

Screen
50th anniversary

Volume 50 Number 4 Winter 2009



Animation and automation

Cyborg brain in *Possible Worlds*

Cinema in the gallery

The ur-text of modernist television drama

Almodóvar's short stories

screen

Screen

Volume 50 Number 4 Winter 2009

OXFORD

Subscription & order information: **Screen** (Print ISSN 0036-9543, Online ISSN 1460-2474) is published quarterly in March, June, September and December by Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK. Annual subscription price is £138/US\$276/€207. A subscription to **Screen** comprises four issues. All prices include postage, and for subscribers outside the UK delivery is by Standard Air. Annual Subscription Rate (Volume 50, four issues, 2009): Institutional: (print and online) £138/US\$276/€207 (print only) £131/US\$262/€197 (online only) £131/US\$262/€197. Personal: (print only) £48/US\$96/€72. Please note: US\$ rate applies to US and Rest of World, except UK (£) and Europe (Euros). There may be other subscription rates available, for a complete listing please visit www.screen.oxfordjournals.org/subscriptions.

The current year and two previous years' issues are available from Oxford University Press. Previous volumes can be obtained from the Periodicals Service Company, 11 Main Street, Germantown, NY 12526, USA. Email: psc@periodicals.com. Tel: +1 (518) 537 4700. Fax: +1 (518) 537 5899. **Screen** is distributed by Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA. Periodicals postage paid at Rahway, NJ and at additional entry points. US POSTMASTER: send address changes to **Screen**, c/o Mercury International, 365 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA. Issue date: **September 2009**

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ISSN 0036-9543

Typeset by Techset Composition Ltd, Salisbury, UK.

Printed by Bell and Bain Ltd, Glasgow, UK.

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50:4 Winter 2009

issue editor

John Caughie

VIVIAN SOBCHACK: Animation and automation, or, the incredible effortfulness of being **375**

SYLVIE BISSONNETTE: Cyborg brain in Robert Lepage's *Possible Worlds* **392**

ERIKA BALSOM: A cinema in the gallery, a cinema in ruins **411**

LEZ COOKE: *Three Ring Circus*: the ur-text of modernist television drama **428**

PAUL JULIAN SMITH: Almodóvar's unpublished short stories and the question of queer auteurism **439**

REVIEWS

JAMES ZBOROWSKI: Andrew Britton, *Britton on Film: the Complete Film Criticism of Andrew Britton*, ed. Barry Keith Grant **450**

FRANCES BONNER: Stephanie Marriott, *Live Television: Time, Space and the Broadcast Event* **453**

JAMES CHAPMAN: J. P. Telotte (ed.), *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* **456**

STEVE NEALE: Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Film Performance* **459**

DEBORAH CARTMELL: Christine Geraghty, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*; Jack Boozer (ed.), *Authorship in Film Adaptation* **462**

DEREK DUNCAN: Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943*; Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* **465**

JOHN ORR: Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: the Ethic of the Image* **468**

JASON TOYNBEE: Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together* **471**

MIRIAM ROSS: Constanza Burucúa, *Confronting the 'Dirty War' in Argentine Cinema, 1983–1993: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations* **473**

CONTRIBUTORS 476

NOTES TO CONTRIBUTORS 478

cover illustration

Image taken from *WALL-E* (Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studio, 2008)

Animation and automation, or, the incredible effortfulness of being

VIVIAN SOBCHACK

What might it mean to bring together the concepts and practices of ‘animation’ and ‘automation’ – the one entailing (in often vexed ways) not only movement and life but also a form of cinema and cinema as a form; the other entailing not only self-moving, mechanized systems devised to replace human labour but also the modern cinematic – animatic apparatus? Furthermore, what might it mean to bring these terms together at this particular juncture in the technological and cultural history of moving images and images that move us? We now live in a culture pervaded by perceptive and cognitive computational machines (perhaps better called ‘entities’) that have achieved such power and agency as to have achieved what some might call ‘a life of their own’. In contrast, we also now live in a culture in which our ‘humanity’ is increasingly (to use a phrase familiar to animators) ‘squashed and stretched’ by forces beyond our control; and thus it often seems that our lives no longer quite belong to us, that we have become increasingly powerless and, however frenzied, increasingly inert. As animation theorist Alan Cholodenko concludes: ‘Life is already anemic in comparison with motion, or there is a life of motion which is increasing while the motion of life is decreasing’.¹

With this in mind, I would like to consider a central sequence from Pixar’s and Andrew Stanton’s award-winning, computer-animated film *WALL-E* (2008).² Here Cholodenko’s assessment of the current relation between motion and life is made quite literal. The sequence occurs about a third of the way into the science-fiction fantasy, and we have already learned that, seven hundred years from now, humanity has literally trashed and then abandoned Earth, which is now uninhabited but for

1 Alan Cholodenko, ‘Speculations on the animatic automaton’, in Alan Cholodenko (ed.), *The Illusion of Life II: More Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2007), p. 521, n. 44.

2 *WALL-E* (Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar Animation Studio, 2008). Directed by Andrew Stanton. Written by Andrew Stanton and Jim Reardon. Based on a story by Andrew Stanton and Pete Docter. Cinematography by Jeremy Lasky with Danielle Feinberg. Edited by Stephen Schaffer. Production design by Ralph Eggleston. Music by Thomas Newman. Produced by Jim Morris. Featured Voices: Ben Burtt, Elissa Knight, Jeff Garlin, Sigourney Weaver, and Fred Willard.

cockroaches and WALL-E, a mobile, distinctly mechanical-looking, hardworking and battered little trash compactor with expressive binocular/videocam eyes. We have also seen the arrival of EVE, an egg-shaped electronic probe sent to earth to search for plant life, and soon engendered as the 'lonely' trash compactor's sleek, polymer and clearly electronic paramour. Once EVE fulfils her mission, however, her directive returns her to the Axiom, an orbiting spaceship on which what is left of humanity has been living for generations. In concert with WALL-E, who has followed EVE, we board the Axiom for the very first time as the sequence begins.

In search of EVE, the little trash compactor is immediately caught up in a frenzy of animated movement and blur, with various robotic machines zipping along electronically regulated pathways (figure 1). Indeed, several times WALL-E is bowled over by them and, stunned to a stop, creates a traffic jam. Initially there are no humans to be seen, but eventually one and then another appear among the robots whizzing by: two cartoon-round, bloated and infantilized men reclining in 'hover chairs', talking to each other through their own separate video screens although they are side by side, their only active moving parts their mouths and their toes, the latter deftly working the hover chair controls (figure 2). As WALL-E moves further into the Axiom – to a main area resembling a huge shopping mall with piped-in advertising appeals and huge screens instead of stores – the mass of hover chairs increases, their occupants all dressed in uniform leisure suits (figure 3). And, then, trying to hand his empty 'Big Gulp' drinking cup to WALL-E, who is mistaken for a 'service bot', one of the men falls out from his hover chair to flail about helplessly on the ground. Immediately, he is cordoned off from the whizzing movement around him by two robots as a booming voice from nowhere repeatedly instructs him: 'Please remain stationary. A service bot will be here to assist you momentarily' (figure 4). This vision, as one reviewer put it, is 'a blissfully inspired *reductio ad absurdum* – or, more accurately, *inflatio ad absurdum*',³ in which, as another writes, 'humanity's turned globular to the point of immobility'.⁴ On the Axiom, Cholodenko's 'motion of life' has become clearly 'anemic' (however bloated), whereas, in contrast, 'the life of motion' has become both literally and metaphorically 'vital'. Indeed, animation in this instance is almost completely transferred to the zippy, busy machines that perform automatically and tirelessly the labour – the 'effort' – necessary to both human movement and human life.

Throughout, *WALL-E* not only foregrounds but also makes thematic the oppositions, confusions and transferences of animation as a vexed concept, and raises its corollary, 'inanimation'. Indeed, what Cholodenko writes of animation in general, *WALL-E* literalizes in particular:

Animation cannot be thought without thinking loss, disappearance, and death . . . one cannot think the endowing with life without thinking

3 Joe Morgenstern, 'WALL-E is richly human tale of a robot', *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 June 2008.

4 Robert Wilonsky, 'WALL-E: robots in love', *The Village Voice*, 24 June 2008.



Fig. 1.



Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.



Fig. 4.

All images from *WALL-E*
(Walt Disney Pictures and Pixar
Animation Studio, 2008).

5 Alan Cholodenko, 'Introduction', in Alan Cholodenko (ed.), *The Illusion of Life: Essays on Animation* (Sydney: Power Publications, 1991), p. 21.

6 Participants' brief for the 'Animation and Automation' symposium, held at the University of Manchester's Centre for Screen Studies and Lancaster University's Centre for Science Studies, 26–27 March 2009.

7 Vivian Sobchack, 'The scene of the screen: envisioning photographic, cinematic and electronic "presence"', in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 136–7. Emphasis in original.

of the other side of the life cycle – the transformation from the animate into the inanimate – at the same time, cannot think endowing with motion without thinking the other side of the cycle of movement – of metastasis, deceleration, inertia.⁵

In this regard, it is worth noting that the increase of interest in animation, both generally as an idea and particularly as a cinematic form, has been coincident not only with the increasing power and reach of computer graphics, but with an increasing focus on the 'posthuman'. This 'post' articulates a primary shift in cultural consciousness and human labour from the mechanically automated to the electronically autonomous, and pointing to our present existence in a transitional moment, its imagination uneasily located (again to use a term central to animation) 'in between' future and past, gain and loss, promise and nostalgia, animate and inanimate – and, of course, life and death.

Indeed, *WALL-E* gives allegorical form to this imagination and, as should be apparent by now, will serve as my tutor-text in what follows. A computer-graphically animated 'film' appreciated more by adults than by children, it provides a particularly apposite instance of – to quote the brief of a recent symposium on animation and automation – 'the entanglements of moving images, animate entities, and machinic agencies', as well as of 'the place of movement, the constitution of life, liveness and liveliness, the shifting of agencies from bodies to machines, the unstable boundaries of the organic and the synthetic, and the remembered histories and projected futures of anatomical and technical configurations'.⁶ Before returning to *WALL-E*'s entanglements, however, I think it important to address our own remembered histories and projected futures – for these greatly inform what are historically shifting (and shifty) definitions of 'animation' and 'automation', as well as of 'animate entities', 'liveness' and 'agency'.

Although generations always overlap, at this still millennial moment the gap between young and old takes the measure of two technological worlds that are radically different. Our encounters with the dominant technologies of our respective generations have each differently informed – and transformed – us as embodied and self-reflexive subjects. As I wrote long ago in 'The scene of the screen: envisioning photographic, cinematic and electronic "presence"':

Each technology not only differently *mediates* our figurations of bodily existence but also *constitutes* them. That is, each offers our lived bodies radically different ways of 'being-in-the-world'. . . . Each differently and objectively alters our subjectivity while each invites our complicity in formulating space, time, and bodily investment as significant personal and social experience.⁷

Generational modes of perception and cognition are thus different, even as those of us who are older have to some degree come to experience the modes of those who are younger, and to a lesser extent vice-versa. Our

metaphors and models have also changed with the generations, and thus we conceive and speak of ourselves differently in a world where computers get ‘viruses’ and we are not sure in whose – or in what kind of – anatomical ‘bodies’ our own ‘neural nets’ and ‘distributed’ or ‘artificial’ intelligence begin or end. Thus, for many of us on the far side of fifty, the ‘passing of a generation’ (our own) is deferred through a reversal: we ‘reanimate’ ourselves as the ‘generation of a passing’ and attempt to embrace this transition to new forms (both fascinating and fearsome) of movement, animation and life.

Certainly, given our increasing lifespan, fifty is merely ‘middle-aged’ for most of us (including *Screen*, which is celebrating its fiftieth anniversary as I write). Nonetheless, in the context of increasingly rapid technological and cultural change and the exhaustion its excitations often produce, it can, at times, seem positively ancient. Indeed, facing not only our own mortality but also that of photochemical cinema as we once knew it, it often takes a great deal of effort (and bravado) for a certain foundational generation of academic film scholars to remind ourselves that both we and cinema are not so much ageing as always becoming. A certain sense of generational mortality remains, however; and, as in the computer-generated *WALL-E*, it metaphorically compounds the end of human being – that is, of human presence and animation – with the ‘death’ of photochemical cinema. It is hardly a coincidence, then, that a number of recent books by long-established scholars such as Mary Ann Doane and Laura Mulvey have turned their attention to the inanimate stillness at the heart of cinematic animation and articulated it as, to use Mulvey’s recent title, *Death 24x a Second*.⁸ A generational and existential slippage is at work here, however productive. As Deborah Tudor writes, ‘When photochemical images are placed in dialectic with digitized images produced solely within the computer . . . this slippage lets film instead of actuality become the “lost real”, the point of certainty and origin for representation’.⁹

And so we return to *WALL-E*, where ‘the death of cinema’ is particularly poignant given its computer-generated context. Historically and formally, *WALL-E*’s simulations pay cinephilic homage to photochemical cinema – this not only through its haunting computer-graphic ‘cinematography’ (Roger Deakins was a consultant) but also through its remarkable, dialogue-free, ‘silent’ first act, its explicit modeling of its quasi-mechanical protagonist on Buster Keaton and Charlie Chaplin, and its often hilarious citations of science fiction movies both classic and contemporary. But this slippage, in which ‘film instead of actuality’ becomes the ‘lost real’, goes further yet in *WALL-E*: the loss of photochemical ‘cinema’ as the loss of the ‘real’ is also conflated with the loss of terrestrial human life. Indeed, in an early scene, the loss of human movement and life becomes the centre for an elegiac piece of what psychoanalysts call ‘mourning work’, less for the quasi-mechanical *WALL-E* than for the audience viewing their own absence in a future

⁸ See Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006).

⁹ Deborah Tudor, ‘The eye of the frog: questions of space in films using digital processes’, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 48, no. 1 (2008), p. 92.

Fig. 5.



‘that will have been’. And this mourning work is inaugurated by an old movie.

The scene occurs on a deserted and desolate Earth marked by trash, endless skyscrapers of compacted consumer detritus, and swirling dust storms. WALL-E, whom we have just met and who is engendered as a ‘he’ (of some sort), finishes his programmed robotic work for the day, returns to his huge metal container of a ‘resting place’, and watches (indeed, fetishizes) an old salvaged videotape of the romantic musical *Hello, Dolly!* (Gene Kelly, 1969) (figure 5). Sitting centrally as it does in this computer-graphically rendered mise-en-scene, the videotape functions not only narratively as a remainder/reminder of a once vibrant, long-gone humanity capable of song, dance and romance, but also formally as a remainder/reminder of a once live-action but long-gone photochemical cinema capable of an indexicality that exists even when its subject is a fantasy. What strikes me most about the videotape, however, is that it is a *videotape*. It stands, then, not only as a substitute for the loss of cinema and the loss of humanity, but also for a peculiarly absent (if presently ubiquitous) DVD – or, given this is Pixar via Disney, Blu-ray. Indeed, in this scene, the videotape effectively serves, both narratively and formally, to overwhelm signs of ‘new media’, and of *WALL-E*’s own digital mode of animation.

It is telling that the little trash compactor’s microchip existence is sublimated, if not repressed. Compared to all other ‘machinic entities’ in the film, WALL-E is figured as primarily mechanical – familiar not only in his visible accomplishment of routinized workhorse labour but also in his material vulnerability to age, decay and obsolescence (WALL-E is the last ‘Waste Allocation Load Lifter – Earth Class’ standing, and repairs himself using spare parts from his long-fallen brethren). Thus, WALL-E is aligned not only with photochemical analogue cinema and the visible labour of automated mechanical movement but also with biological, ‘analogue’ life itself – this figured by the presence of a single cockroach and a lone seedling that the trash compactor finds germinating in terrestrial detritus and plants in an old boot. Indeed, WALL-E’s often contradictory alignments (he was, after all, devised to replace human

beings) both dramatize and return us to the dialectic and confusion that attach to the idea not only of animation but also of automation.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word 'animation' has long been with us, but the two elements of its general definition – 'the [state or] action of imparting life, vitality, or (as the sign of life) motion' – although intimately related, are, as suggested earlier, often at significant odds with each other. The *OED*'s first usage dates back to the late sixteenth century, when animation is connected to the divine, as in 'Such are strengthened by the arm and animation of God'. In this transcendental context it is also connected to 'anima', the qualitative and immeasurable vital principle or soul, as in the seventeenth-century usage 'The fourth act that goeth to make man, is called Animation'. Indeed, even in the clockwork-obsessed late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries 'animation' is opposed to the mechanical and calculative, as in the usage 'Mere Mechanism . . . can never account for Animation, or the animal life of even the lowest insect'. Thus, internally propelled mechanical movement during this period was seen not in the qualitative terms of 'animation' but as the calculative, and will-less, capacity of 'automata', as in 'Those automata, do by little interstices, or strokes, measure out long portions of time'. In the nineteenth century, however, the usage of 'animation' (Mary Shelley's, in particular) transfers the divine power to endow 'life itself', including self-propelled movement as one of its signs, to humans (Dr Frankenstein, in particular) as in 'Capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter'. However, this human rather than divine capacity to bestow 'life' upon 'lifeless matter' also provokes the nineteenth-century question of 'anima' or vital principle that has plagued 'animation' ever since: the question asked in the dictionary under neither 'animation' nor 'automation' but 'automaton': "'Do you think so?" said the Princess. "Have these automata, indeed, souls?"'

In the twentieth century the human power to bestow movement and, questionably, life, upon inert matter is further transferred, this time from human to machine (in particular, the cinema), when 'animation' is first defined as: 'The production of "moving pictures"' and/or 'the technique by means of which movement is given, on film, to a series of drawings'. Thus, as early as 1912 another very contemporary (as well as ancient) conundrum related to animation is articulated, when the *OED* quotes A. Talbott, writing in *Moving Pictures*: 'What we describe as animated photography is not animation at all. All that happens is that a long string of snap-shot photographs . . . are passed at rapid speed before the eye.' Here emerges the Zeno's paradox of cinema and its automated and calculative process of animation. Indeed, for many film theorists in the 1970s as well as for Talbott, the mechanical, serial and quantitatively measurable cause of the motion picture produced only the 'illusionary' qualitative effect of seamless movement rather than 'real' movement. How one responds to this paradox not only determines what shall count as the criteria for movement, but also what distinguishes mechanical movement from the 'real' movement of 'life'.

Once animation was connected to cinema and its automated mechanisms (which became increasingly electronic), its doubled definition turned yet again on itself. As Lev Manovich points out, given the major mainstream shift in the 1990s to digital filmmaking, twentieth-century definitions of animation as a particular cinematic practice no longer hold in the twenty-first century. Thus, he writes in 2001 in *The Language of New Media*, ‘The history of the moving image . . . makes a full circle. *Born from animation, cinema pushed animation to its periphery, only in the end to become one particular case of animation.*’¹⁰ Published ten years earlier when it might have seemed extreme, this same claim was made by Cholodenko in his *The Illusion of Life*. Today, however, it appears prescient. Animation has pushed cinema to its limits, and human motion as the analogue sign of what has heretofore counted as ‘real’ animation has been captured through digital means, so that what is animate and what is inanimate form a composite not easily discernible in its parts or effects. Thus, once again, as Cholodenko puts it:

Animation bedevils definition, even (and especially) ‘its’ own – double – definition. . . . By this doubling, this multiplying and dividing, even of ‘itself’, animation poses the very question of life itself, movement itself, and their relation, a complicated coimplicated relation in which . . . each of the terms solicits and replies (to) the other.¹¹

Given this vexed history of definitional and conceptual convergences and reversals, Cholodenko thus prefers to theorize what he calls the ‘animatic’ – a neologism that not only points to a ‘disseminative process [that] implicates and is implicated in and by the play of a mechanical apparatus’ but also ‘problematizes any simple distinction between life and movement, animism and mechanism, human and nonhuman, animation and cinema, film and world’.¹² As the *OED* entries demonstrate, such simple distinctions undo themselves in a profound confusion and dialectic that is as primitive in its animism as it is sophisticated (and rational) in its automatism. Indeed, Sergei Eisenstein understood this as early as 1941 when, contemplating Disney cartoons, he recognized that ‘the condition of the indissolubleness (the unity) of animateness [anima–soul] and movement [mobility] is already profoundly “atavistic” and completely in accord with the structure of primitive thought’.¹³ Thus, however much we may disavow it, we still engage in ‘magical thinking’ and tend to confer on inanimate matter both anima and mobility. Even in these most sophisticated times, we kick the tyres, engender objects and wonder about the ‘secret life of things’. (It is worth noting that, at this historical moment, along with increased scholarly interest in animation and the ‘posthuman’, there is also increased interest in ‘the object’ – this as an ‘entity’ no longer thought of only as a ‘commodity fetish’.)

But what, then, of ‘automation’ and the way it is conjoined with and/or opposed to ‘animation’? The entry in the *OED* is brief: ‘Automatic

¹⁰ Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), p. 302. Emphasis in original.

¹¹ Cholodenko, ‘Speculations on the animatic automaton’, p. 486.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 501.

¹³ Sergei Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, ed. Jay Leyda, trans. Alan Upchurch (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1986), p. 54.

control of the manufacture of a product through a number of successive stages ... by extension, the use of electronic or mechanical devices to replace human labour'. It was startling, however, to find out that the modern word we use was coined only in 1948, (at the coalescence of the post-World War II military-industrial complex) and defined then, in *American Machinist*, as 'the art of applying mechanical devices to manipulate work pieces ... and to perform these tasks in timed sequence with the production equipment so that the line can be put wholly or partially under pushbutton control at strategic stations'. By 1953, the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* uses the word thus: 'Many factories are spending large sums on "automation", that is, the adoption of automatic machines working together with little labour'. As might be expected, emphasis is on the substitution of machine for human; replacing the subject as it were, but also suggesting that automatic machines (at least visibly) exert 'little labour' in themselves.

There is not much more, although we are told that the word appears in a 1669 volume with the cryptic title, *Brief Account of the New Sect of Latitude-Men*, but is now thought to be a misprint of 'automaton', the word that was first used in the 1600s to mean both 'something which has the power of spontaneous motion or self-movement', and a 'mechanism having its motive power so concealed that it appears to move spontaneously'; 'a machine that has within itself the power of motion under conditions fixed for it, but not by it'. As with animation, then, the concept and motive power of the automaton, from the first, turns in on and reverses its meaning – movement the linchpin, but spontaneous agency (or anima) the true sign of 'life'. Indeed, the initial entry in the *OED* for 'automatic', inaugurally used in the early 1800s, reads: 'Self-acting, having the power of motion or action within itself'; this again conflating movement and anima through use of the word 'self'. It is particularly telling, then, that under this usage the *OED* cites a scientist who, writing in 1879 that the amoeba may be spoken of 'as being irritable and automatic', immediately qualifies himself with the following note: 'Automatic ... has recently acquired a meaning almost exactly opposite to that which it originally bore, and an automatic action is now by many understood to mean nothing more than an action produced by some machinery or other. In this work I use it in the older sense, as denoting an action of a body, the cause of which appears to lie in the body itself.'

This contemporary emphasis on automation as 'having its motive power so concealed that it appears to move spontaneously', but doing so 'under conditions fixed for it, but not by it', does not return us as yet to the visibly hardworking, curious and 'self-acting' WALL-E; but it does return us to the cinematic apparatus and, even more so, to the computer, whose 'motive power' not only often appears 'spontaneous' but also seems to involve 'little labour' because we do not see its moving parts in automatic and serial action. Indeed, as Guilian Bruno has written, 'Objects of leisure, the automaton and the cinematic apparatus both hide the mechanism that creates movement, pretending to require no effort in

14 Guiliiana Bruno, *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 148.

representation or reception and creating the illusion that the graceful technical exhibition entertains automatically'.¹⁴ Thus, emerging concurrently with the advent of automation is a long-held popular dream of technology (whether mechanical, cinematic or electronic) that is informed less by the logic and rhetoric of rational efficiency (prediction and control, repetition and replication) than by an aesthetics of effortlessness, the lighter side of the alienation of labour.

This humanly inhuman dream of effortless movement – of a truly 'incredible lightness of being' – brings us to what, in the 1940s, Eisenstein called the plasmatic nature of film animation. The plasmatic, however, is also phantasmatic – the viewer's knowledge of its very laborious production sublimated in the pleasure of 'magical thinking'. Once the 'lightning hand' of early animators such as Emile Cohl and the Fleischer brothers disappeared from the screen, animators have ceded their visible 'shamanic' power, which reappears explicitly only occasionally in their own creations (such as the powerful wizard in Disney's *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* [1940] or Bugs Bunny as Chuck Jones's alter ego, sadistically transforming Daffy Duck and his cartoon world in *Duck Amuck* [1953]). Indeed, the plasmatic's seductive spontaneity, freedom and agency to become what it will not only effaces but also alienates the extraordinarily intensive labour (both human and machinic) necessary to its very human and effortful creation. As Scott Bukatman has noted, the labour that goes into animation (producing drawings by hand or rendering them computer-graphically) 'is erased once that "spark of life" energizes the animated figure; a transfer of energy occurs: the creation is energized; the creator enervated. . . . Taylorist production is superseded by images and beings that seem to generate spontaneously.'¹⁵ Thus, as computers consume our energy and lives and computer graphics have become increasingly plasmatic, and as the painstaking physical labour of animators has been increasingly replaced, first by the electronic (and invisible) labour of their computers, and then by the apparent and effortless vitality of their creations, our fantasies have come to condense and display increasing uncertainty about what it means (for both our artefacts and ourselves) to be not only animated but also animate. That is, it is one thing to be animated through the machinic or electronic sensory regulation of self-movement – the little robotic vacuum cleaner that goes around cleaning up one's mess does that (both in 'real life' and, with personality, on the spaceship in *WALL-E*) – but it is quite another to be animate by virtue of those unprogrammable, contingent and self-creative processes we identify with what seems spontaneous and voluntary activity. These are the processes we always measure against our own human processes as the sign of agency; or, more precisely, as the sign of a self-consciousness and adaptive reflexivity that is, as Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela define these central features of the living, autopoietic and creative rather than, as in processes of automation, predictable and replicative.¹⁶

15 Scott Bukatman, 'Disobedient machines: animation and autonomy', in Roald Hoffmann and Iain Boyd-Whyte (eds), *Beyond the Finite: the Sublime in Art and Science* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming, 2010).

16 Humberto Maturana and Francesco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: the Realization of the Living* (New York, NY: Springer, 1991).

WALL-E, however, literally embodies the signs of both animation and automation. On the one hand, the little Waste Allocation Load Lifter – Earth Class efficiently and repetitively fulfils its centuries-old and mundane programmed tasks collecting and compacting trash into blocks, and the blocks into skyscrapers of detritus. On the other hand, ‘he’ has developed over these centuries an autopoietic and reflexive consciousness figured not only as eccentric to his programming but also as a sign of some sort of autonomous ‘life’. Indeed, we see this autopoiesis quite literally at work in an early scene. We watch the little trash compactor dutifully go about his programmed labour, at the same time testing and salvaging things that pique his not quite anthropomorphic curiosity. He finds a brassiere and covers his binocular eyes with it; he finds a toy paddle with attached ball and figures out how to play with it; he finds a little velvet box that contains a diamond ring and, tossing the diamond away, saves the box, which he puts in an old plastic cooler he uses to collect his daily treasures; finally, he finds the lone plant and pots it in an old boot that he has also deemed worth saving.

WALL-E, then, is a category-blurring entity, and yet he also functions dialectically. The little trash compactor literally embodies not only the contradictory mechanistic and animistic modeling of animation as, on the one hand, automatic and repetitive movement and, on the other, autonomous and autopoietic life, but he also acts out an atavistic synthesis that, as Eisenstein recognized, conflates the inanimate and animate, the object and subject. Dialectic, therefore, is not only constituted in conceptual oppositions and their synthesis at a hierarchically higher level of understanding. As Gilles Deleuze writes, dialectic also ‘implies transpositions or displacements . . . resulting in a scene being enacted simultaneously on several levels with reversals and reduplications in the allocation of roles and discourse’.¹⁷

These levels of transposition and the roles and discourse allocated to the rusty and vulnerable WALL-E are complex and telling. At one level of the futuristic narrative and its figuration, it/he functions for viewers in the present (adults as well as children) as a transitional object. That is, in both psychoanalytic and cultural terms, the trash compactor serves to materially mediate between two different stages of human development. Ever present and usually beaten-up and dirty from constant use, the transitional object’s value lies in its significant and benign role of allaying separation anxiety – this by providing continuity between a period in which the human subject experiences an illusory omnipotence over the world and others and a more mature period in which the human subject recognizes its separation from, yet dependence on, others, whom it finds it cannot always predict and control. WALL-E, indeed, is just such a transitional object – a rusty, beat-up ‘yellow blanket’, with both mechanical treads and a microchip core. He thus provides continuity between one stage of our technological development and another, embodying not only the phantasmatic memory of our omnipotent mastery over earlier mechanical technology but also allaying our

17 Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism: an Interpretation of Coldness and Cruelty*, trans. Jean McNeil (New York, NY: Georges Braziller, 1971), p. 21.

Fig. 6.



phantasmatic separation anxiety from it, and enabling our shift to an electronic technology that seems, again phantasmatically, often to have a secret mind of its own.

Furthermore, as a transitional object it is particularly telling that WALL-E's mechanical labour is emphatically figured as both visible and effortful, unlike his microchip core, which remains hidden until late in the film. Thus, within the film's dialectical transpositions (rather than the *OED*'s), the perception of mechanical and industrial labour as effortless (involving 'little labour') is here figured as particularly laborious; this, of course, in contrast to the invisibility and effortlessness (as well as further alienation) of labour as it is now phantasmatically perceived in relation to electronic technologies. The quasi-mechanical WALL-E is hardworking, gets tired, needs rest, and has a difficult time getting up in the morning. Nonetheless, the trash compactor's hard labour is hardly figured as alienated; and this, even as that labour is now twice alienated: once from human hands to mechanical machines and again from mechanical machines to electronic and computer-graphic ones.

Perhaps even more striking in regard to its function as a transitional object is WALL-E's miniaturization. Both in the mise-en-scene, and against the actual 'real world' size of an industrial trash compactor, WALL-E is figured as little and childlike (shades of ET), and thus, like our miniaturized and electronic PCs, non-threatening. Indeed, WALL-E's figuration as a benign and transitional throwback to an earlier (and more familiar) stage of technological development is particularly apparent in those scenes in which he first watches and then engages EVE. Unlike WALL-E, this Extra-terrestrial Vegetation Evaluator is pristinely shiny and white, has few moving parts, is airborne rather than gravitationally grounded, and initially blasts anything that moves (figure 6). Also, unlike WALL-E, EVE exists solely to fulfil a programmed directive. It is only under WALL-E's tutelage and care that EVE becomes reflexively adaptive and creative. On the one hand, then, WALL-E is a technological antique, aligned not only with the loss of cinema, but also with the loss of the 'mechanical' in general and the familiarity with which 'omnipotent' humans regard their artefacts. On the other hand, as a transitional object that is mechanical but also

benignly – that is, only slightly – electronic, WALL-E, in his admiration, pursuit and tutelage of EVE, also serves as a bridge to the future present of technological development.

On another level, however, the film's dialectic simultaneously generates further transpositions and, indeed, a reversal; for WALL-E, the transitional object (phantasmatically a 'he') also functions as a transitional subject. On the one hand, in relation to the film's desolate terrestrial vision of human absence, the sight of a robot touched by its spectre in a remnant of cinema evokes not only nostalgia for something lost but also anxiety about what has taken its place. As Susan Stewart observes in *On Longing*: 'The dream of animation . . . is equally the terror caused by animation'. That is, it depends upon 'the obliteration of the subject – the inhuman spectacle of a dream no longer in need of its dreamer'.¹⁸ On the other hand, the robot is 'touched', and we see that 'the subject', 'the dreamer', survives – transmigrated, ironically, to its not only animated but also animate and autopoietic artefact. Thus WALL-E does not just work, as we might say of a machine. Rather, he is figured as 'hardworking', as well as 'plucky' and 'lonely'. He has developed over the centuries both a childlike curiosity and the quasi-anthropomorphic sensibility of a collector. Indeed, it is no accident that many of his scavenged treasures evoke human childhood – actual toys like the paddle and ball, various squeeze toys and bubble wrap, but also the velvet ring box that is highly valued while its contents are tossed away. A transitional subject, WALL-E has also developed a borrowed-upon human (if heteromachinic rather than heterosexual) dream of romantic communion and care. Rendered technologically obsolete, yet humanized and engendered as he is, it is no wonder that his protective enclosure – a giant garbage truck – is figured not only as a 'home' but also a *Wunderkammer* or curiosity cabinet, an archive of odd human artefactual remains that bemuse, amuse or touch him in a machinic but also human way – among his favourite things are a Rubik's Cube, a mechanical egg beater, Zippo lighters, car hubcaps and an ancient videotape that preserves the human memory of romance. EVE, however, initially shares none of WALL-E's quasi-human curiosity and sensibility. It is only under his tutelage that we first hear her electronically burble a machinic version of what we understand, after all, as the equivalent of a human laugh – this when he shows her how to 'pop' bubble wrap. Indeed, not only for its human absence but also for its remnants of human presence, the scene in which WALL-E shows EVE all his treasures and then plays for her his precious videotape raises the same poignant questions asked of Walter Benjamin's 'Arcades Project' by Susan Buck-Morss in *The Dialectics of Seeing*: 'Can we view seriously, with reverence, the discarded material objects of mass culture as monuments to the utopian hope of past generations, and to its betrayal? Who will teach us *these* truths, and in what form shall they be passed on to those who come after us?'.¹⁹ WALL-E, a transitional subject as well as a transitional object, thus stands with his *Hello, Dolly!* videotape not only for 'the utopian

18 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p. 172.

19 Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 336.

hope of past generations' but also – and with EVE – as the new 'form' of 'those who come after' to whom these hopes (and their betrayal) have been passed.

In this regard, it is not surprising that David Denby, *New Yorker* film critic, calls the computer-generated film 'a work of tragic nostalgia' in which 'a bad old movie keeps the human idea alive in two robots'.²⁰ Indeed, as a transitional subject, *WALL-E*'s 'animatic' preservation of that idea is ultimately responsible not for Stewart's 'obliteration of the subject' but, instead, for the subject's reanimation – and the return of humanity to terrestrial presence. Thus, even from the first, I would hesitate to call *WALL-E*'s spectacle 'inhuman', or, for that matter, 'posthuman' – not only because this is a benign Disney film with a putatively happy ending, but also because, as Keith Moxey puts it:

The ways in which objects call to us, their animation, their apparent autonomy, stem only from their association with us. To insist on their 'secondary' agency is not only a means of recognizing their independence but also their dependence on human culture. They may haunt us but their autonomy is relative. They cannot exist without the power with which we invest them.²¹

As human artefacts, *WALL-E* and EVE may redeem human terrestrial culture by the film's end but, from the start, they have been animated and redeemed from a merely automatic existence by it. That is, their self-referential autonomy or autopoiesis is derived from our own – the same even in its eccentric machinic difference.

At this level of the film's dialectic, however, yet another interesting reversal occurs. Although as a transitional object *WALL-E* functions to ease viewers from an earlier mechanical stage of technological development to a 'more mature' *rapprochement* with the electronic, as a transitional subject *WALL-E* functions in reverse, easing humanity from the 'mature' stage of electronic sloth and dependency to an earlier stage in which visible effort and physical labour become the privileged qualities that generate autopoiesis and define 'animation' as both movement and life. As we have seen, the little trash compactor makes centuries of hard labour in a lowly occupation pay off. Together, movement and work are figured as self-generating, producing (or reproducing) curiosity, adaptability, emotion, desire and (dare I say) 'intersubjectivity'. It takes the animated and animate *WALL-E* to regenerate these qualities in, and reanimate, the merely 'cartoon' humans on the spaceship Axiom, those who, in their supposedly mature stage of technological development, are so dependent upon electronic machines and screens that they can barely move. Furthermore, here on the Axiom, *WALL-E*'s reversals go deep, since in the midst of this *narrative* critique of electronic dependency as leading to human bloat and inanimation the film performs a literal computer-graphic sleight of hand – the animator's – and formally mimics not photoreal movies but old animated cartoons. Indeed, it is most telling that on the ship's bridge we see a series of

20 David Denby, 'Past shock: the current cinema', *New Yorker*, 2 July 2008, p. 93.

21 Keith Moxey, 'Visual studies and the iconic turn', *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 2 (2008), p. 142.

Fig. 7.



Fig. 8.



photographs of the Axiom's captains through the centuries, the series moving from photorealistic portraiture of easily identifiable human men at its beginning to increasing cartoonishness as its subjects inflate over time (figures 7–8). The great in-joke of this exhibit is revealed on the DVD commentary: the portraiture is actually of *WALL-E*'s animators, who here play with their own photoreal supersession by electronically rendered cartoons.

The 'squashed and stretched' humans on the Axiom are also remarkably standardized: all are obese and effectively unable to move, let alone act, on their own. (Indeed, one of the most humorous moments in the film occurs when the current captain laboriously, but successfully, gets to his feet, accompanied by 'Thus Spake Zarathustra' from *2001: A Space Odyssey* [Stanley Kubrick, 1968].) Indeed, rather than plasmatic, these cartoon humans are inert 'couch potatoes', their possibilities for movement turned over to the hover chairs in which they perpetually recline, the zippy robots that perpetually serve them, and the master computers that direct them. Furthermore, their possibilities for demonstrating any meaningful human agency – purposeful effort, curiosity, desire – are both limited and regulated by the computerized screens and electronic machines that constantly surround them. Round as they are, these cartoon humans have been flattened into automated similitude. All alike, they move in regulated series in regulated patterns

and along regulated pathways, the products of some postindustrial assembly line run by master computers that cannot (and, in *WALL-E*, will not) diverge from their programmed directive, however illogical it may, over time, have become.

Interestingly, these automated cartoon humans evoke Eisenstein's own dialectical critique of Disney animation in 1941. Early on in his collected notes, *Eisenstein on Disney*, he writes what might well be a present gloss on *WALL-E*'s 'Axiomatic' vision of an alienated and cartoon human future: 'You see how the drawn magic of a reconstructed world had to arise at the very summit of a society that had completely enslaved nature – namely, in America'. And he continues with ambivalent admiration:

Disney is a marvelous lullaby for the suffering and unfortunate, the oppressed and deprived. For those who are shackled by hours of work and regulated moments of rest, by a mathematical precision of time, whose lives are graphed by the cent and dollar. Whose lives are divided up into little squares, like a chess board.²²

22 Eisenstein, *Eisenstein on Disney*, p. 3.

Or, we might say today, whose lives (both the animated and the animate) are divided up into little squares by pixels. *WALL-E* shows a more contemporary (as well as futuristic) form of 'shackling' and 'regulated moments', and thus turns Eisenstein's critique topsy-turvy and yet rightside-up again – pointing not only to a humanity deprived of physical labour yet still oppressed and regulated, but also to an excess of calculative work accomplished by computers whose 'precision of time' is 'graphed by the cent and dollar'. One wonders, then, whether the 'shackled' here include the human computer animators whose invisible labour confers upon the little trash compactor the visibility of their own elided work and desire, their own human animation and 'life'; *WALL-E* is, after all, a commodity, and one that has made Disney a huge amount of 'cents and dollars'. Indeed, meditating on computer graphics, spectacle and the 'capitalist sublime', philosopher Greg Tuck is apposite: 'On the one hand', he writes, 'the spectral nature of commodities accounts for how such dead things take on the sublime quality of the human, while the living labour (and labourers) become dead, quantifiable things. On the other, the spectre itself remains dominant.'²³

23 Greg Tuck, 'When more is less: CGI, spectacle and the capitalist sublime', *Science Fiction Film and Television*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2008), p. 266.

Thus, to conclude, much as I find *WALL-E* easy to love, much as I admire its formal achievements and narrative complexity (I have only scratched the surface here), my preference in animated films has always been for those that visibly labour. For me, Willis O'Brien's animated model King Kong with its jerky attempts, its laborious struggle, to achieve both 'movement' and 'liveness' far surpasses Peter Jackson's effortless and computer-graphically rendered King Kong. And I much prefer the effortful animations of Jan Svankmajer or the Brothers Quay in which puppets are chipped and broken and always in a visible intermittent, intervallic movement that stutters and starts anew, reminding one (at least one on the far side of fifty) how difficult it is to be animate, to be alive, to struggle against entropy and inertia. This is

24 Annmarie Jonson, 'Porky's stutter: the vocal trope and life/death in animation', in Cholodenko (ed.), *The Illusion of Life II*, p. 425.

animation that speaks to its (and our) existence, animation that, as Annmarie Jonson suggests, 'bridges the threshold between, reveals the compossibility or undecidability of, both vivification and deanimation, life and death, the animate and inanimate'.²⁴ That is, in real life – human life – to be animate is not merely a continuous and plasmatic given. And, even for the young among us, both movement and becoming have themselves become increasingly difficult – and this despite (although also because of) our latest technologies. We encounter friction, obstacles; we are forestalled; we experience fatigue, desire, and secretly seek not more momentum but less. Indeed, surely ironically meant, Milan Kundera's 'incredible lightness of being' is something we rarely experience, most often associating such 'incredible lightness' not with (or as) ourselves but rather with (or as) moving image animation and its lack of gravity and with automation and its 'little labour'. There is, of course, a paradox in our weary longing for and elation at watching plasmatic ease, and this is that the very labour of living is our most primal work and that which most enlivens us. Thus, in the end, we return to *WALL-E*, which makes this paradox visible – and, paradoxically, in the most computer-graphically plasmatic (and phantasmatic) way.

This essay is a revised version of my presentation of *Screen*'s 50th Anniversary Public Lecture at 'Animation and Automation', a symposium hosted by the University of Manchester's Centre for Screen Studies and Lancaster University's Centre for Science Studies, 26–27 March 2009. I am most grateful to the journal for this honour, and would like to thank Jackie Stacey and Lucy Suchman for their invitation to, and hospitality at, the symposium. My appreciation also goes to Victoria Meng, and to the *Screen* readers for their generous insights and enthusiasm.

Cyborg brain in Robert Lepage's *Possible Worlds*

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- 1 Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, 'Cyborgs and space', in Chris Hables Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), pp. 29–33.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
- 3 Thomas Elsaesser, 'The mind-game film', in Warren Buckland (ed.), *Puzzle Films: Complex Storytelling in Contemporary Cinema* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 13–41.
- 4 Films grouped under the mind-game tendency are labeled in a number of ways. On complex storytelling and narratives, see Buckland (ed.), *Puzzle Films*; Janet Staiger (ed.), 'Complex narratives', Special Issue of *Film Criticism*, vol. 31, nos 1–2 (2006). On 'forking-path' narratives, see David Bordwell, 'Film futures', *SubStance*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2002), pp. 88–104. On 'multiple-draft' narratives, see Edward Branigan, 'Nearly true: forking plots, forking interpretations: a response to David Bordwell's "Film futures"', *SubStance*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2002), pp. 105–14. On possible worlds films, see Ruth Perlmutter, 'Multiple strands and possible worlds', *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, vol. 11, no. 2 (2002).

The term 'cyborg' was coined by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline at the Space Flight Symposium in Texas in 1960 to describe humans whose bodies could be altered to suit various environments, including the extraterrestrial.¹ According to Clynes and Kline, artefact-organism systems could extend the human unconscious, with self-regulatory controls being just one of the possibilities.² Specifically, their research examined ways of improving humans' physiological and psychological performance, not only with drugs and body prostheses but also through the imagination. In contrast with Clynes and Kline's interest in altering astronauts' spirits in preparation for *outer space* explorations, *Possible Worlds* (Robert Lepage, 2000) explores alternative *inner worlds* and split subjectivities produced by parallel states of consciousness through an image of a brain in a vat connected to a computer.

Possible Worlds, which explores the nature of consciousness and the existence of possible/parallel worlds, is part of a category termed mind-game films, which functions in part to challenge the traditional role of the spectator.³ Mind-game films play with the minds of spectators through complex storytelling and experimenting with spectator address.⁴ In fact, the ways in which mind-game films such as *Possible Worlds* incite new forms of spectator engagement and audience address can 'be seen as indicative of a "crisis" in the spectator–film relation'.⁵ However, mind-game films can also be symptomatic of wider cultural changes, especially as we immerse ourselves deeper within virtual environments and learn to live in an electronically networked society. With this in mind, my essay evaluates the contribution of *Possible Worlds* to this spectator–film relation crisis. I also examine how the nested worlds suggested by the

pp. 44–61. On twist films, see George Wilson, 'Transparency and twist in narrative fiction film', *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 61, no. 1 (2006), pp. 81–95. On modular narratives, see Allan Cameron, 'Contingency, order and the modular narrative: *21 Grams* and *Irreversible*', *The Velvet Light Trap*, no. 58 (2006), pp. 65–78.

5 Elsaesser, 'The mind-game film', p. 39.

6 John Mighton, *Possible Worlds* (Toronto: Playwrights Canada Press, 1997).

envatted brain and the multiplication of possible worlds in this film may function as metaphors for ideologically saturated subjectivities in a computational world. Furthermore, because *Possible Worlds* suggests to spectators that they are potentially brains in a vat, I investigate the self-reflexive strategies with which Lepage tries to raise viewers' awareness of the actual nested worlds of which they are a part.

In *Possible Worlds*, the filmic adaptation of a play by John Mighton, a mad scientist has immersed a human brain in a vat of nutrients to keep it alive.⁶ The system to which this brain is connected maintains its consciousness and enables it to explore multiple realities. The film explores the question of multiplicity of consciousness, both thematically and formally, most notably by using numerous symmetrical images that evoke the mirror structure of the brain's left and right hemispheres. At the beginning of the film, a man is found dead in his apartment with his brain missing. The victim is George Barber (Tom McCamus), a financial consultant with exceptional mathematical skills. His murder is the latest in a series of homicides in which the victim's brain has been removed. Chief Inspector Berkeley (Sean McCann) and his assistant, Inspector Williams (Rick Miller), search for laboratories in which experiments are performed on animal brains, and their investigation leads them to a neuroscientist, Dr Kleber (Gabriel Gascon), who is interested in the philosophical question of why humans have imaginations. The police inspectors later discover that Dr Kleber has stolen George's brain and has been keeping it alive for his scientific experiments (figure 1). In parallel to the police investigation we follow the life of George, who is able to travel in multiple worlds. In these worlds he repeatedly meets different versions of Joyce, to whom he was married in one of his lives. The Joyce characters are played by Tilda Swinton, who portrays each with a different personality, none of whom remembers having previously met George. Dr Kleber causes the different states of consciousness experienced by George, who feels as if he were dreaming or imagining these strange and surreal worlds.

The brains in a vat connected to computers in *Possible Worlds* recall recurrent representations of human beings connected to machines or

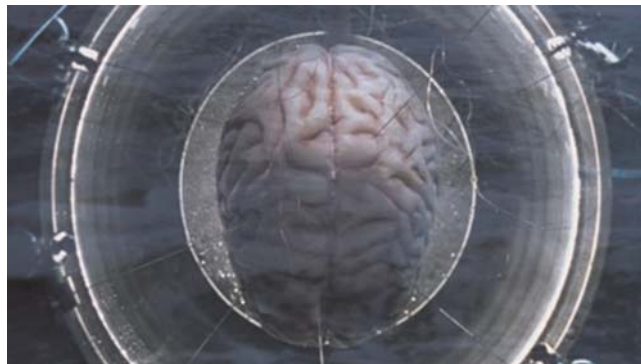


Fig. 1.
All stills from *Possible Worlds*
(Robert Lepage, 2000).

- 7 Dani Cavallaro discusses brains in a vat in cyberpunk fiction and cinema in 'The brain in a vat in cyberpunk: the persistence of the flesh', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2004), pp. 287–305.
- 8 *Possible Worlds* takes part of its inspiration from classic films featuring brains in a vat, including *Donovan's Brain* (Felix Feist, 1953), *The Brain from Planet Arous* (Nathan Juran, 1957), *Fiend Without a Face* (Arthur Crabtree, 1958), *The Brain That Wouldn't Die* (Joseph Green, 1962), and *They Saved Hitler's Brain* (David Bradley, 1963). For some insights on disembodied brains in film, see Christopher Frayling, 'The scarecrow's brain', in *Mad, Bad and Dangerous? The Scientist and the Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 9–47.
- 9 Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); René Descartes, 'Meditations on first philosophy', trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, in *Selected Philosophical Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
- 10 Elsaesser, 'The mind-game film', p. 15.
- 11 Perlmutter, 'Multiple strands and possible worlds'.
- 12 The following is an abbreviated list of texts dealing with possible world narrative theory and parallel universes: Marie-Laure Ryan, 'From parallel universes to possible worlds: ontological pluralism in physics, narratology and narrative', *Poetics Today*, vol. 27, no. 4 (2006), pp. 633–74; Ruth Ronen, *Possible Worlds in Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Lubomir Doležel, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Worlds* (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 13 Perlmutter, 'Multiple strands and possible worlds', p. 44.
- 14 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–8.
- 15 David Bordwell, 'Film futures'.
- 16 Jorge Luis Borges, 'The garden of forking paths', in Anthony Kerrigan

hooked up to digital matrices in cyberpunk cinema.⁷ Recent films such as *The Matrix* (Andy and Larry Wachowski, 1999) and *eXistenZ* (David Cronenberg, 1999) explore the potential of disembodied travel through digital or organic terminals, as well as the possibility of being controlled through these interfaces.⁸ Envatted brains stimulated by electric impulses raise epistemological questions, such as those explored by Hilary Putnam and René Descartes, on the possibility of being manipulated by a mad scientist or an evil genius.⁹ Like several other mind-game films, including *The Matrix* and *eXistenZ*, *Possible Worlds* addresses the 'epistemological problems (how do we know what we know) and ontological doubts (about other worlds, other minds) that are in the mainstream of the kinds of philosophical inquiry focused on human consciousness, the mind and the brain, multiple realities or possible worlds'.¹⁰

In addition to playfully challenging viewers to solve its central mystery, *Possible Worlds*, with its references to parallel worlds, shares characteristics with what Ruth Perlmutter labels 'possible world films'.¹¹ These films present multiple endings and/or multiple or divergent versions of the story that suggest alternative states of affairs or parallel universes.¹² Emphasizing parallelism, many possible world films 'question whether characters with parallel lives would behave differently and whether their destinies would be altered'.¹³ Films with multiple endings such as *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998), or those with characters that get the chance to repeat and alter the course of their life, such as *Groundhog Day* (Harold Ramis, 1993), fall into this category. In her taxonomy of possible world films, Perlmutter also includes patchwork narratives, side-by-side films and forking-path films.¹⁴

In 'Film futures', David Bordwell demonstrates that four recent forking-path films share properties, such as causal linearity and timing, with classical narratives.¹⁵ Bordwell distinguishes Jorge Luis Borges's labyrinthine, quantum physics-inspired narrative in 'The garden of forking paths'¹⁶ from the simpler forking-path film narratives, including *Run Lola Run* and *Sliding Doors* (Peter Howitt, 1998). Bordwell claims that 'narratives are built not upon philosophy or physics but folk psychology, the ordinary processes we use to make sense of the world'.¹⁷ He suggests that complex analytical devices – such as the idea of parallel universes, which evokes an infinite array of possible worlds – are unnecessary interpretative tools, because most forking-path plots present only a limited number of alternative futures. However, although *Possible Worlds* itself depicts this limited number of alternative worlds, the film directly refers to possible worlds of logical philosophy and invites viewers to engage with its philosophical underpinnings. Moreover, as noted by Branigan, not all films with multiple plotlines can 'be understood by simply reordering the plot or changing the emphases placed on details'.¹⁸ Instead, because of their abrupt changes in narrative levels, films with multiple strands that raise ontological doubts about parallel universes, as well as mind-game films that depict conflicts

(ed.), *Ficciones* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1962), pp. 89–101.

17 Bordwell, 'Film futures', p. 90.

18 Branigan, 'Nearly true', p. 107. For a discussion on the limitations of Bordwell's approach to forking-path plots, see also Warren Buckland, 'Introduction: puzzle plots', in Buckland (ed.), *Puzzle Films*, pp. 1–12.

19 Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, p. 29. Saul Kripke, 'Semantical considerations on modal logic', *Acta Philosophica Fennica*, no. 16 (1963), pp. 83–94.

20 Warren Buckland, 'Between science fact and science fiction: Spielberg's digital dinosaurs, possible worlds, and the new aesthetic realism', *Screen*, vol. 40, no. 2 (1999), pp. 177–92. C. Paul Sellors, 'The impossibility of science fiction: against Buckland's possible worlds', *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 2 (2000), pp. 203–16. Warren Buckland, 'A reply to Sellors's "mindless" approach to possible worlds', *Screen* vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 222–26.

21 Buckland, 'Between science fact and science fiction', p. 177.

22 Sellors, 'The impossibility of science fiction', p. 205 (italics in original).

23 David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 2.

24 Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, p. 22. For a third approach, the antirealist view, see *ibid.*, p. 23 (italics in original).

25 Sellors, 'The impossibility of science fiction', p. 215.

between world orders, incite viewers to juggle between forms of subjectivities, ontological shifts and temporal segmentations.

In engaging with these ontological issues, approaches to fictional worlds based on possible world philosophy, such as the ones developed by Ruth Ronen, Marie-Laure Ryan and Lubomír Doležel, are useful in solving the mind-game about the truth of George's existence in *Possible Worlds*. Drawing from the possible worlds model developed by the philosopher Saul Kripke, but abandoning its metaphysical claims, the plurality of worlds of fiction 'contains "an actual world" and a set of possibilities, alternatives, predictions and forecasts non-actualized in the fictional world'.¹⁹

The relevance of designating worlds of fiction as possible worlds was the subject of a recent debate in *Screen* between Warren Buckland and C. Paul Sellors.²⁰ In 'Between science fact and science fiction', Buckland sets out to demonstrate that *Jurassic Park* (Steven Spielberg, 1993) and *The Lost World* (Steven Spielberg, 1997) articulate 'a possible world because they show one possibility that can emerge from a state of affairs in the actual world'.²¹ In his response to Buckland's article, Sellors refutes the possibility that fictional worlds can be ontologically similar to actual worlds, claiming that 'fictions can *never* articulate possible worlds, even though, from an interpretive point of view, they may engage actual-world possibility'.²² The source of the conflict between Buckland and Sellors stemmed partly from their different approaches to possible worlds philosophy and their differing opinions on how to adapt this model to the study of fictional worlds.

As a heterogeneous paradigm, the possible worlds concept of logical philosophy encompasses contradictory definitions for possible modes of existence and various views on the degree of realism to be ascribed to possible worlds. According to David Lewis, the major proponent of the radical view known as modal realism, possible worlds are countless parallel worlds, something like autonomous remote planets with their own physical proprieties and with an actuality of their own.²³ According to the various advocates of a second view, commonly termed moderate realism, the

actual world is a complex structure that includes both its actual elements and non-actual possibilities, that is, the ways things might have been (whether these non-actual possibilities exist as *mental constructs*, as postulated by Rescher, as *non-obtaining states*, as proposed by Plantinga, or as a *set of propositions* about things in our world, as suggested by Adams).²⁴

According to Sellors, 'there does not seem to be much hope to rescue fictional worlds, however constructed, as possible worlds; fictions contradict the very foundations of possible worlds metaphysics'.²⁵ That is, despite their intention to depict alternative possible but non-actualized courses of events, films like *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* are still semiotic objects and incomplete worlds, depicting fictional characters

26 See Sellors's argument on the difficulty of directly applying possible world philosophy to fictional worlds. Ibid., pp. 212–15.

27 Ronen, *Possible Worlds*, p. 88.

28 For details on the distinction between possible and impossible worlds as well as between natural and supernatural worlds, see Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, ch. 5.

29 Buckland, 'Between science fact and science fiction', p. 183.

30 Doležel, *Heterocosmica*, p. 115.

31 Buckland, 'A reply to Sellors's "mindless" approach to possible worlds', p. 222.

and fictional events, which includes them in an ontological category different from alternative possible but non-actualized courses of events that emerge from the actual state of affairs.²⁶ Nevertheless, while fiction cannot articulate possible worlds as defined by logical philosophy, possible worlds semantics adapts this philosophy to consider problems of reference, representation, and fictionality in fictional worlds. According to this approach:

Fictional worlds can be regarded as possible or impossible constellations of events and situations which are fictionally actualized or non-actualized. . . . A fictional world is not a modal extension of the actual world, but rather a world with its own modal structure.²⁷

While fictional worlds are logically and ontologically parallel to the actual world, this does not prevent fictional claims from being interpreted as referring to the actual world or to the ways the actual world could have been. While Buckland concentrates on films that depict alternative possible but non-actualized courses of events ('physically possible' worlds), possible worlds semantics examines all types of fictional worlds and what makes them logically possible or impossible.²⁸ Buckland includes the worlds in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* within a special category of fictional worlds according to their relation with a reference world: 'The reference world in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* is not the actual world (these films are not documentaries), nor is it a purely imaginary world (these films are not purely fictional either)'.²⁹ These films are natural fictional worlds, a special case of the vast collection of "physically possible" worlds, worlds where nothing exists and nothing happens that would violate the laws of the actual world'.³⁰ In depicting a possible alternative to the actual state of affairs, they particularly strive to fulfil requirements of verisimilitude, truthfulness and plausibility. Buckland argues that the digital compositing technique has the capacity to erase its traces of production, enabling the films to achieve a photorealistic articulation of a possible world in which dinosaurs exist. Referring to the non-actualized possibility of growing dinosaurs from fossil DNA, Buckland claims 'that the dinosaurs exist in a conceptual PW [possible world], and that this conceptual PW is being realized on screen via digital technology'.³¹ He also makes us realize that aesthetic features produced with digital effects are not only used to characterize ontological states within a film text (dream, death, alive), but can also help film viewers distinguish films according to their worlds of reference (our actual world, past worlds, supernatural worlds or natural possible worlds).

While the logic and consistency of the worlds in *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* are not explicitly challenged, in *Possible Worlds* viewers must struggle to reconcile fictional fragments and apparent logical contradictions in order to create a unified possible world. The complexity of the narrative, paired with the detective investigation into George's mysterious murder, prompts viewers to find 'the rules of the game'.

Doležel designates as ‘authentication’ the process by which a semiotic system grants fictional existence.³² In literature, this is accomplished through the use of narrators, who help readers establish fictional facts. However, in *Possible Worlds*, viewers must also look at aesthetic characteristics, such as analogies and special effects, to extract meaningful patterns in order to reconcile contradictory facts, distinguish between ontological planes and attempt to authenticate George’s fictional existence. Through analyzing this authentication process, we will examine how metonymical images of water, glass and containment may suggest that the protagonist is a brain in a vat.

Before solving the mystery about the recurring metonymical images, however, viewers must come to terms with George’s character inconsistency: he has been declared dead at the beginning of the film but remains constantly present onscreen. This type of inconsistency is not unique to *Possible Worlds*, as in other possible worlds films ‘characters aspire to more than one life, become multi-vocal, metamorphic, or exchange personalities with other characters, thus violating character consistency’.³³ In *Possible Worlds*, Joyce and George meet in parallel worlds but they do not have the same level of awareness about these worlds: Joyce has varying professions and personalities in the different worlds imagined by George; George remains emotionally detached and slow paced throughout, suggesting that he is the same person. Furthermore, Joyce does not remember having previously met George in other worlds, while George remembers the different Joyces. When he meets Joyce in a bar, he tells her: ‘I am everybody . . . I know everything . . . Each of us exists in an infinite number of possible worlds.’ He also tells her that he has been everywhere. While alluding to the theory of possible worlds, George’s statement questions the physical limitations of place and space, issues that are relevant to defining subjectivity in cyberspace. As noted by Sandy Stone, ‘a disembodied subjectivity messes with whereness. In cyberspace you are everywhere and somewhere and nowhere, but almost never *here* in the positivist sense.’³⁴ George’s feeling of disembodied subjectivity can be compared to virtual communities of users who access digital multiple universes with their avatars, such as internet gamers playing in Multi Users Dungeons (Muds) or Object-Oriented Muds (Moos).³⁵ George’s multiple selves allude to the ways in which the unitary self is superseded by multiple selves, the avatars we create in various digitally synthesized environments, including electronic chat-rooms, videogames, social networking sites and Moos.

After their meeting in the bar, in a sequence taking place in Joyce’s apartment, it is clear that Joyce doubts George’s veracity about his multiple lives: ‘Look, that story was funny last night, but . . .’. However, because he repeats a similar story, she seems to start questioning his sanity. Moreover, because George shares so many stories with these different Joyces, he sometimes appears confused about the identity of the Joyce he is talking to. For instance, after staying the night at her

33 Perlmutter, ‘Multiple strands’, p. 44. On character inconsistency in complex narratives, see also Buckland, ‘Introduction: puzzle plots’, and Elsaesser, ‘The mind-game film’.

34 Sandy Stone, ‘Split subjects, not atoms; or, how I fell in love with my prosthesis’, in Chris Hables Gray (ed.), *The Cyborg Handbook* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), p. 398 (italics in original).

35 Muds and Moos are highly structured virtual spaces in which several internet users can play at once. For more on Muds and Moos, see Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York, NY and London: Simon and Schuster, 1995). Michael Wedel comments on the similarity between Lola in *Run Lola Run* and a videogame avatar in ‘Backbeat and overlap: time, place, and character subjectivity in *Run Lola Run*’, in Buckland (ed.), *Puzzle Films*, pp. 129–50.

apartment, he is suddenly unsure if she is the stockbroker or the neuroscientist, as she wears a towel on her head and hair colour is their distinguishing visual feature – one is a blonde and the other a redhead. This moment of confusion introduces more doubts about George's state of mind and makes it difficult to determine whether a philosophical theory of possible worlds can rationalize his beliefs or whether he has mental problems.

According to Ryan, when confronted with contradictory versions of events, a genuine multiverse narrative must prevent the following strategies from yielding the most satisfactory interpretation: *Mentalism* postulates that the multiple worlds in the story do not exist objectively because they are, for instance, the products or the symptoms of mental conditions such as multiple personality disorder. *Virtualization*, typical of interactive narratives, stands for the case of stories with multiple branches in which the world shown by the current branch is the actual one, as opposed to the others, which are just nonactualized possibilities. *Allegory and metaphor* illustrate the case in which the multiple versions stand for a concept rather than an objective representation of the course of events. *Metatextualism* suggests that the parallel lives of the characters happen in different drafts of a novel in progress. *Magic* occurs when the irrational is limited to narrow areas that pierce the texture of the world portrayed. *Do It Yourself* is observed when the text inspires free play with its element, challenging the readers to rearrange contradictory passages into coherent timelines.³⁶

Although, as we have seen, the 'mentalism' option cannot be totally eliminated, a viewer may also rationalize the film with the help of parallel realities and thus avoid contradictions, which, in disrupting the narrative flow of the entire film, would prevent the construction of a 'possible' fictional world.³⁷ If a viewer chooses as a provisional, valid option that George actually physically exists simultaneously in an infinity of possible worlds, this viewer may be tempted to affirm that George adheres to modal realism. Moreover, George's extensive knowledge of mathematics suggests that he believes in the idea of 'parallel universes' in physics, a view compatible with modal realism. In *Scientific American*, the physicist Max Tegmark describes four levels of parallel universes with their own sets of physical laws, which may or may not be compatible with our actual universe depending on the level.³⁸ In each level, he suggests different ways for justifying the possibility that parallel universes exist.³⁹ Tegmark describes Level 4 as mathematically coherent universes, which can exist physically but can also be divorced from space and time. According to Ryan,

the postulation of parallel universes is not only one of several ways to deal with apparent contradictions in the behaviour of subatomic particles, it is also one of several possible modes of rationalization for texts that report contradictory versions of events.⁴⁰

36 For a detailed description of strategies that can rationalize contradictory versions of events, see Ryan, 'From parallel universes', pp. 669–71.

37 Possible in the sense of logically possible.

38 Max Tegmark, 'Parallel universes', *Scientific American*, vol. 288, no. 5 (2003), pp. 40–51.

39 For a detailed explanation of the four different levels of parallel universes in physics, see Ryan, 'From parallel universes', pp. 635–43.

40 Ibid., p. 668.

Possible Worlds may fit into Level 4 of Tegmark's theories about parallel universes. When explaining to Joyce in the bar that he exists in an infinite number of possible worlds, George tells her that when working out a mathematical problem in seventh grade, halfway through his calculation he saw himself solving the problem another way. Here, a first shot of the right hand of a boy solving a mathematical problem is followed by a mirror image of the boy doing the same problem, but this time he writes the equation with his left hand and the equations are symmetrically inverted (figure 2). The mathematical possibility of this type of event occurring in our actual world is almost zero; however, from George's point of view, it is possible. While Levels 1, 2 and 3 all suggest copies of universes in parallel spaces, they usually do not imply exact copies of events repeated in the same universe. In a later sequence, George and Dr Kleber are both standing next to a lighthouse, catching a glimpse of themselves looking into the distance at two men manipulating blocks (figure 3). Although it is not clear whether they recognize themselves, since they can barely see at such a distance, this moment seems to confirm to viewers that George experiences a world following different laws of physics and that the multiplicity of his lives is not, as Joyce believes, merely a product of his imagination. As noted by Ryan, it is important that an explicit exposition of quantum cosmology or a

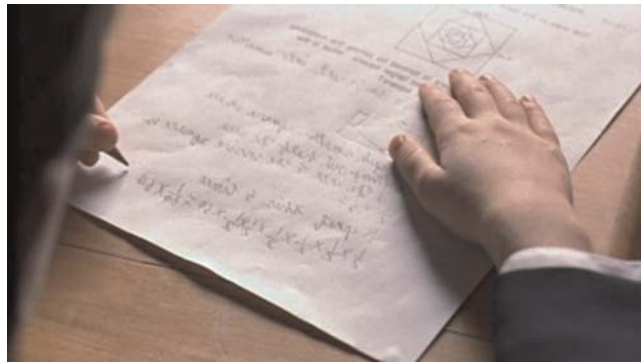


Fig. 2.



Fig. 3.

41 Ibid., p. 671.

thematic awareness of cosmological issues invite the readers/viewers to reflect on the nature of space, time, identity and memory because 'the idea of parallel realities is not yet solidly established in our private encyclopaedias, and the text must give strong cues for us to suspend momentarily our intuitive belief in a classical cosmology'.⁴¹ In *Possible Worlds*, George's repetitive assertions about being part of multiple possible worlds, his remembering a mirrored world computed mathematically, and the recursive embedding within the same image of George and Dr Kleber seeing themselves from a distance, all support the existence of parallel realities.

42 Ibid., p. 669.

However, near the end of the film George refutes the possibility of having multiple lives and concludes that he is dreaming. According to Ryan, this rationalization of the multiple contradictory versions corresponds to the 'mentalism' strategy, since George no longer believes that the multiple worlds exist.⁴² In cinema, certain disruptions of cinematic conventions that are disorienting for the viewers may also suggest symptoms of mental conditions affecting the protagonist. For instance, the sequence in which George visits a beach house presents a series of events without apparent connection to the main story. The blurred quality of the image, the dancing character with chicken feathers on its forehead, and the matrix of holes perforating the walls of one of the rooms, which recalls the motifs on Dr Kleber's computer case, suggest a dream state. Moreover, without apparent reason, in the beach house George sees Dr Kleber standing at the bottom of a staircase which is adjacent to the room with holes in its walls. George meets Dr Kleber downstairs, and in the next shot we see them exiting together from a lighthouse, this strange cut blurring the boundaries between two different locations. The recurring motifs and the editing in this sequence suggest porosity between dream and reality. This sense is heightened by the fact that while George's ontological quest seems to meet a dead end when he affirms that he is only dreaming, viewers previously received mutually supportive visual clues that instead suggest the source of George's elusive sense of self to be that he is a brain in a vat.

Like other mind-game films, *Possible Worlds* delights in disorienting spectators and requires their active participation in deciphering its rules. Viewers trying to understand the opposition between the actual occurrences and the many nonfactual possibilities happening in the film may imagine themselves in a three-level structure of fiction. The fictional worlds of the film operate as a dual structure where first- and second-order fictions are subsequently nested inside the actual world of the viewers.⁴³ In the first-order fiction, or world^b, George is a brain in a vat. The second-order fiction, or the series of worlds^{c1,c2,c3}, and so on, is a product of George's consciousness induced by electric stimuli. From the perspective of world^a, the actual world of the viewers, world^b is a fiction, but in relation to the series of alternative worlds imagined by George, world^b is granted a provisional reality status. From the perspective of the

43 I adapt Jenn Stephenson's three-level structure in theatre to cinema. Jenn Stephenson, 'Metatheatre and authentication through metonymic compression in John Mighton's *Possible Worlds*', *Theatre Journal* vol. 58, no. 1 (2006), p. 76.

44 Ibid., p. 88.

people in world^b, such as the detectives, world^c is the product of George's imagination and therefore a nonactual world.

In her investigation of the staged production in light of the possible worlds narrative theory developed by Doležel, Jenn Stephenson explores the metonymical relations between various elements in the play and the brain in a vat. In the play, 'the alignment of objects of disparate ontological orders reflects the nested play structure of plays-within-plays and worlds-within-worlds'.⁴⁴ *Possible Worlds* also employs metonymic imageries and mise-en-abymes to create analogies between George's imaginary worlds-within-worlds and the world from the point of view of an envatted brain. While these analogic relations become more evident through accumulation, other strategies, such as disrupting cinematic conventions and blurring the boundaries between the different worlds George visits, positively encourage viewers to speculate about the peculiarity of George's world.

Possible Worlds invites viewers to query their senses as it constantly subjects them to disruptions in cinematic style, narrative conventions and editing techniques which progressively destabilize the coherence of George's world. In *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes reflects on the risks of relying only on our senses:

Whatever I have up till now accepted as most true I have acquired either from the senses or through the senses. But from time to time I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once.⁴⁵

45 Descartes, 'Meditations on first philosophy', p. 71.

At the beginning of *Possible Worlds*, shots of an old man on a ladder washing windows invite viewers to access a highly aesthetic world that privileges angular organization of objects within the frame, as well as frames-within-frames (figure 4). By successively moving the camera away from the man, viewers can observe three similar shots of the man on the ladder, but from different points of view. This strategy may appear strange to some viewers, as it follows the opposite order of usual establishing shots: the series of shots starts with a closeup of the man, whose face is hidden, washing away the soap on a window, and ends with an ensemble shot that reveals the inside of an apartment and the man, standing outside on the ladder looking inside. These establishing shots introduce recurring motifs, including bubbling water, contrasts between inside and outside, oppositions between containment and contained-motifs, which are all associated with the image of the brain in a vat. Moreover, attentive viewers are prompted to examine closely the filmic image and its sophisticated cinematic language to gather clues to resolve the murder mystery.

Peculiar events start occurring after George enters a cafeteria filled with people dressed in white blouses. Although there are many people in the cafeteria, at first we can barely hear them talking. Then George sits with Joyce, someone whom he is supposedly meeting for the first time but who actually went to the same high school. Their conversation is

Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.



strangely focused on the brain. We know from the opening scene that someone had stolen a brain from a corpse, but viewers are still unsure whether George is the victim. George asks about news of the missing brains that he has read in the *National Inquirer*. When George guesses that Joyce is a neuroscientist, she asks him if he reads minds. Moreover, Joyce speculates about having two brains and tells George that he has only one life, a fact that viewers will increasingly come to question. The language game between them playfully foreshadows the problem of George's multiple lives. However, the intense focus of the conversation on the brain seems unusual. In the last shot of the scene, a zoom-in on George's soup that emphasizes the circularity of the bowl, accompanied by a flash of lightning and a strange synthetic noise effect, confirms that there is something peculiar about George.

The coherence of George's world is also progressively challenged through breaks in cinematic convention, such as editing techniques that disrupt psychological realism. For instance, in a sequence related to Inspector Berkeley's investigation, a shot frames a large tank full of liquid, with the Inspector and the technician responsible for developing the murder scene photos standing behind. In the next shot, the camera shows a closeup of pictures floating in the liquid. However, as the camera moves forward, in addition to the pictures that one would normally

expect to find in a developing tank, a calculator, papers and a box of pencils incongruously appear in the frame. Then an inverted reflected image of George appears in the undulating liquid (figure 5). The liquid stops moving and the camera starts tilting up, progressively revealing George's hands beside the table, and coming to rest on a shoulder shot. This smooth dreamlike transition between different spaces confirms the oddness of George's world, especially when he demonstrates his extraordinary skill in mental calculation to the people interviewing him for a consultant's job at a pharmaceutical company. Embodying the impressive abilities of a computer, George simulates a neuron in a biological processing network, the fluid editing hinting at his biological symbiosis with a computational world. In addition to joining dislocated spaces and adding a dreamlike quality to George's world, the editing emphasizes the plurality of narrative threads. The editing strategies not only suggest to viewers that their senses can easily be deceived, but that George's worlds are ontologically different from the world in which the detectives investigate the murders. Although breaking classical cinematic convention, the fluidity of the analogical editing suggests to viewers that these different ontological worlds are more porous than the characters might be aware.

While George is able to conceive that he is part of an infinite number of possible worlds, he does not voice the concern that his thoughts might be manipulated by an external source. In his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, when trying to explain the sense of his existence, René Descartes makes the hypothesis that God does not exist and that his sensory experiences are induced by

some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning [who] has employed all his energies in order to deceive me. I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 79.

While acknowledging the possibility of this assumption, as he does not have any reliable means of determining whether what he perceives actually exists, Descartes prefers to reject the hypothesis that he is 'like a prisoner who is enjoying an imaginary freedom while asleep'⁴⁷ and instead continue believing that 'there is an omnipotent God who made [him] the kind of creature that [he is]'.⁴⁸ By contrast, towards the end of the film, when George is interrogated by a psychiatrist who looks like Dr Kleber for having harassed one of the Joyces on the beach, he rejects the possibility of having a soul:

When I believed I had a soul I was imprisoned in myself. I felt I should be consistent among my lives, but now I realize they're all different and I can enjoy them all. And if there's a unity that makes them all me,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

I don't know what it is. This is simply a world where I happen to be a criminal.

For George, it is not the possibility of being manipulated by a malicious demon that makes him a prisoner, but the necessity of condensing all his personalities, memories and lives within one soul. In his attempt to find a coherent explanation for the simultaneity of his lives, he says to the psychiatrist: 'I know where I am now. There's only one world. I've been dreaming.'

For viewers, George's life in world^c appears to be made of dreams induced by Dr Kebler in his experiments. However, George's dreams in world^c allude to the reality in world^b when he describes one of his dreams to the psychiatrist:

I'm floating in the sea, two inches below the surface, rocking in the warm salt water, like someone who's drowned. The sky above me, the still of clouds, but they're hard-edged like glass. The whole sky glitters like glass. I close my eyes and hear voices.

The description of the sky in George's dream alludes to the world from the point of view of the immersed brain in Dr Kebler's laboratory in world^b. In addition, the inversion of dream and reality from the different points of view of these two worlds works as a mirroring image. This specular image formally complements the nesting effects of the worlds within worlds and the parallel organization of the narratives.

Because Descartes believes that body and soul are separate entities without physical connections, he imagines an evil genius manipulating him to believe that what he perceives is merely a web of appearances. In *Reason, Truth and History*, Hilary Putnam reexamines Descartes's hypothesis and replaces the supernatural malicious demon with an evil scientist who has removed a brain from a body and placed it in a vat of nutrients to keep it alive. In this scenario, the nerve endings have been wired to a computer that produces electronic impulses which induce perceptions that are qualitatively analogous to those experienced outside the vat. The illusion is so perfect that the person can see, feel and move his/her limbs the same way he/she could before the operation. Although theories of malicious demons manipulating our senses and of brains in a vat are questionable, as Putnam demonstrates, they are nevertheless helpful in analyzing literature and films in which characters question or adhere to these theories. For instance, in *Possible Worlds*, 'by varying the program, the evil scientist can cause the victim to "experience" (or hallucinate) any situation or environment the evil scientist wishes'.⁴⁹ However, while in *Possible Worlds* George can sense that something is wrong with him without guessing that he is a brain in a vat, viewers receive multiple clues to guide them to envision this possibility.

The accumulation of images alluding to containment, glass and water increases viewers' awareness of their presence and invites viewers to create a broader network of meanings. For instance, on his way to

49 Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, p. 6.

50 Elsaesser, 'The mind-game film', p. 39.

Dr Kebler's laboratory, in which there is a rat's brain in a vat connected to multiple wires, Inspector Berkeley passes through a maze of conduits and pipes lining the metallic walls and ceilings. The greyish drab walls of the laboratory recall the colour of a brain, the running pipes on its ceiling evoke wires, the computers symbolize mental powers, and the numerous drawers and compartments suggest the divisions within the cortex. The architecture of the laboratory, alluding to the sinuous surface of a brain covered with filaments growing out of it like wild herbs, suggests a *mise-en-abyme* of a brain in a vat (figure 6). As noted by Elsaesser, mind-game films 'favour pattern recognition (over identification of individual incidents), and require cinematic images to be read as picture puzzles, data-archives, or "rebus-pictures" (rather than as indexical, realistic representations)'.⁵⁰ Here, the association of the laboratory with a living organic brain also encourages viewers to pay attention to relationships between living and nonliving entities, such as neuronal networks and architectural networks.

Possible Worlds explores the idea of increasing imagination or expanding the brain's potential. Dr Kebler tells Inspector Berkeley:

The question is why do we have imaginations? A rat can only imagine so much. It's limited by the structure of its brain. Creatures like us that



Fig. 6.



Fig. 7.

can anticipate possible futures and make contingency plans have an evolutionary advantage. We'd be foolish not to use our imaginations.

Tired of being the butt of his chief's sarcastic comments about his intelligence, Inspector Williams decides to buy himself a self-help tape, *Consciousness Revolution*, to improve his imagination. In one sequence, he sits in his car and listens to the tape while going through a carwash; a shot reveals the Inspector's eyes in the rearview mirror, surrounded by soapy water sprinkling on the windshield (figure 7). In this sequence, the car engulfed in soapy water metonymically alludes to the brain in a vat. The visual emphasis on bubbles and looking through water and glass creates associations with an envatted brain. From the numerous symmetrical images, metonymical associations and mise-en-abymes in *Possible Worlds*, viewers may wonder if these formal strategies suggest that 'they' are possibly brains in a vat.

As opposed to Descartes's evil genius and Putnam's mad scientist, Lepage foregrounds his strategies to manipulate viewers and consequently heighten their self-awareness about being controlled by media. In contrast to *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World*, and not unlike most mind-game films, *Possible Worlds* does not give viewers the illusion of transparent access to reality. Through self-reflexive strategies that upset audiences' absorption in the action, *Possible Worlds* makes viewers aware of its cinematic conventions.⁵¹ By foregrounding the alternation between theatricality and absorption, Lepage, who has adapted his last four films from plays, may be reminding viewers about the theatrical origins of this film. The concept of remediation is also central to possible world films. In reference to the branching plot structure and instant replay effect in *Run Lola Run*, Perlmutter claims that recent possible worlds films 'prefigure the next "remediation", i.e., the proliferation of new media'.⁵² And like *Run Lola Run*, *Possible Worlds*, with its states of consciousness induced on demand by computer stimuli, 'prefigures the impact of the electronic revolution (e.g., multi-task hypertexts) as envisioned by Marie-Laure Ryan, who links possible worlds narrative theory to computer processing techniques'.⁵³ In addition to alluding to the remediation process between theatre and film and between film and new media, *Possible Worlds* suggests the impacts of remediation on the spectator-film relation. As noted by Elsaesser, mind-game films are indicative of a shift from the classical spectator positions of voyeur and observer to the position of active player in films that underscore 'the rules of the game', and which, at a meta-level, are 'symptomatic [of] wider changes in the culture's way [of] moving images and virtual worlds'.⁵⁴

Through reflexive strategies, *Possible Worlds* encourages viewers to use their imagination and curiosity to increase their awareness of the network of information of which they are a part, and of the fast-paced, changing world that surrounds them in the network society.⁵⁵ With its parallel stories grounded in the corporate world of finance and

51 Although I do not follow Richard Rushton's distinction between nontheatrical, theatrical and antitheatrical cinema, my discussion about the alternation between theatricality and absorption in cinema proceeds from the same debate. See Richard Rushton, 'Early, classical and modern cinema: absorption and theatricality', *Screen*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2004), pp. 226–44.

52 Perlmutter, 'Multiple strands', p. 45. For more on remediation, see Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).

53 Perlmutter, 'Multiple strands', pp. 55–6. See also, Marie-Laure Ryan, *Possible Worlds, Artificial Intelligence and Narrative Theory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994).

54 Elsaesser, 'The mind-game film', p. 39.

55 Characterized by the networking logic of its basic structure, the network society has its economy organized 'around global networks of capital, management and information, whose access to technological know-how is at the roots of productivity and competitiveness'. Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), p. 471.

bioengineering, *Possible Worlds* alludes to larger social issues, including the exploitation of laboratory animals and the profits of large pharmaceutical corporations at the expense of consumers. However, these consumers are not portrayed as totally powerless citizens, as their social protest against animal experimentation can be read as a way to voice disagreement with capitalist corporations. With these considerations of social control in mind, the image of a brain in a vat immersed in water and sustained by its nutrients becomes a possible metaphor for the ways in which subjectivities are flooded by ideology. In this context, the recurring images of a brain in a vat suggest ideological webs constructing subjectivities.

The 'human' is not merely a complex network of biological forces, as the neural network of pipes and wires in Dr Kleber's laboratory and the remarkable computing abilities of George suggest. It can also extend its physical and mental reach with cybernetic media and computer processing. The envatted brain evokes Marshall McLuhan's concept of the 'final extension of the man', envisioned as 'the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media'.⁵⁶ If some, such as scientists Hans Moravec and Ray Kurzweil, believe that the equivalent of a conscious mind can evolve in intelligent robots or can be uploaded onto a computer, McLuhan's metaphor bears some resemblance to the Computational Universe, which Katherine Hayles describes as a universe 'generated through computational processes running on a vast computational mechanism underlying all of physical reality'.⁵⁷ In her theory, the Computational Universe provides both a way to understand the means by which reality is generated and a metaphor for understanding natural and cultural processes.⁵⁸ This new Regime of Computation influences the construction of contemporary subjectivities, as it substitutes Mother Nature with the Universal Computer. Indeed, 'just as Mother Nature was seen in past centuries as the source of both human behaviour and physical reality, so now the Universal Computer is envisioned as the Motherboard of us all'.⁵⁹ Similarly, also foreseeing a shift in ways of constructing subjectivities, *Possible Worlds* suggests that we are brains in a vat connected to the multiple distributed networks of a computational world.⁶⁰

Imagining ourselves as brains in a vat connected to a computer network invites a reevaluation of the boundaries between the 'human' and the 'machine', a questioning about what it means to be alive and a rethinking of regimes of power. Whether one adopts the theory of the Computational Universe or not, the personal computer certainly has, and will continue to have, an impact on forging senses of self, often enabling analogies between mind and machine, as Sherry Turkle demonstrates in *The Second Self*, which studies the impact of computers and virtual technologies on human beings' own self-understanding.⁶¹ Whereas in the

⁵⁶ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 3–4.

⁵⁷ Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2005), p. 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁰ Hayles demonstrates an explicit link between the noosphere, the distributed global intelligence postulated by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in his theory of evolution, and the Computational Universe. *Ibid.*, p. 26. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, NY: Perennial, 1976).

⁶¹ See Sherry Turkle (1984), 'Adolescence and identity: finding yourself in the machine', in *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2005).

62 Donna Haraway, 'A cyborg manifesto: science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century', in David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (eds), *The Cybertures Reader* (New York, NY and London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 34–65, p. 36.

63 Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), p. 212.

64 On synthetic life, see Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago, IL and London: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 223–46.

65 Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, p. 213.

66 Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, no. 146 (1984), pp. 53–92, p. 78. See also Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism*, trans. Joris De Bres (London: NLB, 1975).

67 Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', p. 79.

68 For information on immersion in virtual environments, see Alison McMahan, 'Immersion, engagement and presence: a method for analyzing 3-D video games', in Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (eds), *The Video Game Theory Reader* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2003).

eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the body was conceived of as human, natural and organic, twentieth-century poststructuralist discourses challenged this construct. Donna Haraway suggests that biomedical and military research contributed to the destabilization of the boundaries of the body, 'with machines hav[ing] made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed'.⁶² According to Haraway, 'bodies have become cyborgs . . . compounds of hybrid techno-organic embodiment and textuality. The cyborg is text, machine, body, and metaphor'.⁶³ This blurring of boundaries has the potential to offer an escape from natural and essential unities, unities such as gender or race, to mobilize a plurality of voices against normative structures of domination.

The meshing of the human body and mind with the machine has also further pushed the limits of what it means to be alive, if one considers the invention of the pacemaker, scientists' investigations into ways of uploading consciousness to artificial brains, and research on synthetic life forms.⁶⁴ According to Hayles, analogue subjects, such as humans, are forced to reevaluate their conceptions of their subjectivities when in contact with digital subjects, such as Artificial Life forms, since the interactions between human and nonhuman cognizers distributed throughout the environment create hybrid subjectivities in the form of 'distributed cognitive systems composed of multiple agents that are running the programs from which consciousness emerges, even though consciousness remains blissfully unaware of them'.⁶⁵

The proliferation of virtual creatures, the increased symbiosis between individuals and their computers, as well as revolutions in telecommunications, have modified the economy and the ways in which subjectivities negotiate with power within the network society. Following Ernest Mandel's periodization, Fredric Jameson defines

three fundamental moments in capitalism, each of them marking a dialectical expansion over the previous stage: these are market capitalism, the monopoly stage or the stage of imperialism, and our own – wrongly called postindustrial, but what might better be termed multinational capital.⁶⁶

Images of envatted brains and the reference to possible worlds in Lepage's film evoke 'the world system of present-day multinational capitalism',⁶⁷ in which power is distributed laterally rather than according to a clear hierarchical structure, as in monopoly capitalism. Moreover, George's head immersed in water, which recalls a brain in a vat, suggests that computer technologies are not only tools – extensions of the body – but also immersive environments that can potentially control and manipulate.⁶⁸ For instance, videogames immerse their users in the artificial world of the game, giving them the opportunity to interact with the environment while being subjected to its underlying rules. According to Jameson, individual subjects from late capitalism suffer

69 Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', p. 84.

70 James Hugues, *Citizen Cyborg: Why Democratic Societies Must Respond to the Redesigned Human* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004).

71 Ibid., p. xii.

from an inability to cognitively 'map the great global multinational and decentered communicational network' in which they find themselves.⁶⁹ As a result, these individuals lose track of the origins of the social and political forces that manipulate them.

In evoking emergent types of identity in the network society, *Possible Worlds* also prompts ethical reflections on emerging cultural trends. Joyce, a neuroscientist, is looking for ways to improve intelligence, extend human life and erase unpleasant memories, not unlike transhumanists. Cyborg discourses are however not homogeneous: while transhumanist discourses investigate ways to overcome the problems of physical limitations and finitude, others question essentialist modes of classification, such as the classification of humans and animals according to their intelligence. In *Citizen Cyborg*, James Hugues explores these topics by examining the ethical dilemmas surrounding the definition of humans and the problem posed by the creation of a new type of citizen: the cyborg.⁷⁰ Whereas Haraway envisions a mutable figure that blurs the boundaries between traditional dualisms such as male/female, organic/machinic, nature/culture in order to unite marginalized voices against structures of domination, Hugues's imperative to push the boundaries of humanness, to universalize the cyborg figure and to democratically regulate transhuman technologies is motivated by the utopian vision that 'new forms of transhuman citizenship and democracy will make us freer, more equal and more united'.⁷¹ In *Possible Worlds*, as Inspector Berkeley explains to George's wife, the cyborg brain is alive, but in a fluctuating dream state, probably not aware of who it is. George's ambivalence about his identity may symbolize society's uncertainty about the impact of emergent technologies on its future; or it may also suggest growing anxiety regarding the changing 'nature' of life.

At the end of *Possible Worlds*, Inspector Berkeley unsuccessfully asks Joyce what he should do with George's brain: 'At some point, you'll have to decide whether to allow the brain to continue'. This ending shows how the close meshing of bodies and technologies in contemporary society has complicated what it means to be alive. Although scientists are still unable to maintain a human brain alive, Lepage suggests, as does James, the necessity of anticipating ethical dilemmas in a society of fast-paced scientific discoveries. However, with its open ending, *Possible Worlds* raises questions but gives no answers. As everybody is a potential brain in a vat, Lepage's approach involves spectators in the ethical debate and invites them to question their humanity.

In *Possible Worlds*, the brain in a vat not only suggests a metaphor about subjectivities manipulated by corporate powers: it is also a reflexive strategy that reminds viewers of their active role in the production of meaning. As a metaphor, the brain in a vat suggests immersive worlds, not without resemblance to multi-player universes such as Muds and Moos. While these worlds offer the possibility of exploring alternative forms of identity, the highly structured mechanisms which ensure immersion within these universes can also suggest that

⁷² Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication* (New York, NY: Semiotext(e), 1988), p. 16.

⁷³ Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, p. 34.

immersion can limit imagination. Moreover, by insulating players from their physical environment, immersion can encourage antisocial behaviour by removing players from the 'real' consequences of their actions. While *Possible Worlds* does not embrace a technocratic future, it shows how highly intertwined relationships between humans and machines have become. However, Lepage resists Baudrillard's pessimist claim that 'we no longer exist as playwrights or actors but as terminals of multiple networks'.⁷² The remediation process and the self-reflexive strategies in *Possible Worlds*, in highlighting the 'rules of the game', instead remind viewers that they are simultaneously spectators, actors, players and subjects of empirical research within a society that accumulates more and more information about its citizens. Drawing attention to the spectator–screen relationship and its 'crisis', self-reflexive strategies and editing experiments in *Possible Worlds* raise viewers' awareness, invite them to stay critical and ask them to use their imagination and creativity as ways to escape from the manipulation of normative and oppressive economic structures. While it problematizes the centred subject of liberal humanism and investigates the possibility of accepting computation as the grounds of being, which are central characteristics of the posthuman according to Hayles,⁷³ *Possible Worlds* is still concerned with humanist issues, such as defining human uniqueness and self-improvements. This film suggests that identity is neither entirely of our own making nor imposed on us: identity is a self-reflexive project, a process of becoming which is closely intertwined with economical and technological developments. Instead of being passive, absorbed brains in a vat, cyborg brains can become active social actors of change.

A cinema in the gallery, a cinema in ruins

ERIKA BALSOM

The past two decades have witnessed striking changes in the institution we call cinema. While anxieties over the increasing obsolescence of celluloid film proliferate, the industrial products of cinema have attained a greater reach than ever before, with markets expanding worldwide through the internet and mobile wireless technologies. While interrogations into the contemporary migrations and transmutations of cinema are most frequent at the level of new forms of digital distribution and exhibition, one must not fail to take note of another site that has witnessed a profound reconfiguration of the cinema in recent decades: the art gallery. Throughout the 1990s film and video have become increasingly central to contemporary art practice, moving into the gallery to change both the cinema and the art world. Walter Benjamin in the 1930s had already articulated the pressing question of how the advent of mechanical reproduction, most forcefully embodied in the cinema, might change our conception of art.¹ Without abandoning this notion – for it is by no means settled – we might well want chiastically to invert this query for the twenty-first century and ask how the progressive integration of film into the gallery and the museum, as it mutates and fractures to take on a guise very different to any we have seen before, changes our conception of cinema.

Jean-Christophe Royoux has termed the proliferation of moving-image gallery practices from the 1990s onwards the *cinéma d'exposition* (cinema of exhibition), while Raymond Bellour has called it an 'other cinema'.² Some artists take the cinema itself – its (hi)stories, institutions, fetishes, loves and temporalities – as fertile ground for artistic inquiry. For others, references to the specificity of film history are avoided in

1 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility (third version)', trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume 4: 1938-1940*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2003), pp. 251–83.

2 Jean-Christophe Royoux, 'Remaking cinema', in *Cinema, Cinema: Contemporary Art and the Cinematic Experience* (Rotterdam: NAi, 1999), p. 21; Raymond Bellour, 'Of an other cinema', in Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image: a Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing/Afterall Books, 2008), pp. 406–22.

3 Douglas Gordon and Pierre Huyghe are exemplary representatives of the first tendency, Matthew Barney and Doug Aitken of the second.

4 'Roundtable: the projected image in contemporary art', *October*, no. 104 (2003), p. 93.

5 The etymology of 'exhibit' is from the Latin *exhibere*, from *ex* (out) + *habere* (hold).

6 The term 'transcoding' comes from Lev Manovich, who specifies it to be one of the five principles of new media. See Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), pp. 45, 47.

7 See Bazin's essay, 'Pour un cinéma impur', somewhat unfortunately translated as 'In defense of mixed cinema', in *What Is Cinema? Volume One*, trans. and ed. Hugh Grey (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 53–75.

8 Raymond Bellour, 'Battle of the images', in Jeffery Shaw and Peter Weibel (eds), *Future Cinema: the Cinematic Imaginary After Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), p. 58.

9 Elizabeth Cowie, 'On documentary sounds and images in the gallery', *Screen*, vol. 50, no. 1 (2009), pp. 124–34.

favour of an employment of tropes, strategies and conventions that have been central to it, such as mise-en-scene, montage, spectacle, narrative and duration.³ The prevalence with which practices of this 'other cinema' have appeared in contexts such as the Venice Biennale or in large group exhibitions such as *Hall of Mirrors: Art and Film Since 1945* (Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, 1996), *Spellbound* (Hayward Gallery, London, 1996), *Le Mouvement des images* (Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2006) or *The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality and the Moving Image* (Hirshhorn Museum, Washington DC, 2008), to name only a few, has led Hal Foster to claim that film and video are now the 'default media' of contemporary art.⁴ These works may be said to exhibit cinema in a double sense: they move it into the exhibition space of art, certainly, but they also expose it to view, hold it out for examination as a medical patient might exhibit symptoms.⁵ It is precisely through a reading of such symptoms that one might reconstitute the contemporary contours of an object increasingly hard to demarcate – the cinema.

The current moment is very often conceived as one of convergence, a keyword that signals the ability of new media to 'transcode' all media to a numerical representation of ones and zeros.⁶ For some, digital convergence would vitiate any notion of medium specificity, as the emphasis shifts to immaterial patterns of information communicable across a multiplicity of platforms. While there is a reality to the increased mobility of data in an age of fibre optics, it is now necessary to interrogate the ways in which the boundaries between media are both blurred and articulated, seeing the pairing of convergence/specificity as a dialectical movement that allows for a new assessment of a historicized ontology rather than the disappearance of a given medium, or even the dissolution of the notion of the medium *tout court*. For instead of dissolving the medium – a concept which must be understood as a heterogeneous aggregate that encompasses both a material support and the discourses and institutions that intervene in it – convergence allows for a rethinking of medium specificity that abandons the disciplinary orthodoxy that would delineate an uncontaminated object of 'cinema' in favour of variable and multiple medium specificities irreducible to a stable essence. Taking seriously André Bazin's assertion that cinema is and has always been an 'impure art',⁷ this approach would open film studies to the changing contours of its object, foregoing a purity of cinema in favour of the possibilities that may be generated from its continuing metamorphosis. As Raymond Bellour has put it, the contemporary moment poses the necessity of 'grasping all the arts as part of one single ensemble and analyzing each work in terms of its mix of different art forms, particularly in terms of media, or the artist's choice of confining oneself to one mechanism alone'.⁸

In contemporary art, alongside the use of large-scale, spectacular projected images by artists such as Doug Aitken, Matthew Barney and Pipilotti Rist, or the impulse explored by Elizabeth Cowie in her essay 'On documentary sounds and images in the gallery',⁹ one finds a marked

attention to the small, the precious and the outmoded as embodied in the apparatus of 16 mm film. This is evident in works by artists such as Matthew Buckingham, Tacita Dean, Willem de Rijke/Jeroen de Rooij and Sharon Lockhart, all of whom belong to a mode of film practice often ignored by the discipline of film studies due to modes of distribution (the limited-edition print) and exhibition (gallery installation) that belong to the realm of art. And yet, to take up Bellour's suggestion of interrogating 'the artist's choice of confining oneself to one mechanism alone', such work represents an important contemporary articulation of the medium specificity of film. The fact that this inquiry stems from a domain that is architecturally and discursively removed from what has traditionally been known as cinema contributes to, rather than diminishes, the need for film studies to grapple with it. Roughly concurrent with cinema's 1995 centennial, the use of celluloid returns as a major feature of moving-image gallery practice for the first time since video art displaced the film installations of figures such as Michael Snow and Robert Whitman in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The re-entry of 16 mm into the gallery in the 1990s as a part of a larger turn towards questions of cinema brings with it a host of concerns very different from those at stake a quarter of a century earlier. The baring of the apparatus in the 1960s and 1970s, in conjunction with a phenomenology of spectatorship, has shifted to an exploration of history and the obsolescent. As George Baker has remarked: 'The obsolescent, the "outmoded", the nonsynchronous, discarded forms, marginal mediums: all of these seem to be resources of special interest to many of the most interesting artistic projects today'.¹⁰

While it is true that an interest in obsolescence constitutes a veritable subgenre of contemporary art that extends far beyond any relation to cinema,¹¹ the presence of 16 mm as central to this investigation of 'discarded forms' demands attention from film studies. Within a climate of high-tech novelty, this turn to 16 mm as a vehicle for exploring cinema as an 'old medium' within the spaces of contemporary art prompts a rethinking of medium specificity in the light of obsolescence and in the face of convergence. It is, moreover, a return to a medium specificity strikingly different from Rosalind Krauss's call to 're-invent the medium', a position that attempts to combat a perceived generalization of the aesthetic by returning to a modernist reflexivity forged from discarded media. Central to Krauss's position is that the invented medium – exemplified by James Coleman's use of the slide projector – involves appropriating a disused technology that has 'no aesthetic lineage and . . . is so singular as a support that to adopt it as a medium is immediately to put a kind of patent on it'.¹² An invented medium is the property of a sole owner; this practitioner will be responsible for inventing an aesthetic system for it. Though film provides a model for the invented medium through the aggregate character of the apparatus, the use of 16 mm in the gallery is incompatible with Krauss's position since film has an aesthetic history – and a rich and varied one at that.

10 George Baker, 'Artist questionnaire: 21 responses', *October*, no. 100 (2002), p. 6.

11 This would include work such as Jane and Louise Wilson's video installations of disused sites of bureaucratic power (*Stasi City* [1997]), James Coleman's use of the slide projector (*INITIALS* [1993–94]), or Zoe Leonard's collections of flea-market found objects (*You see I am here after all* [2008]).

12 Krauss, '... and then turn away? An essay on James Coleman', in George Baker (ed.), *James Coleman* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp. 160–61.

Furthermore, many of the artists working with 16 mm today take up this history as central to their project. This essay attempts to move beyond the notion of an invented medium in order to interrogate another way in which medium specificity has emerged as a renewed concern in contemporary art. It will focus on the 16 mm work of the British artist Tacita Dean in order to open a consideration of these contemporary practices and their insistence on both the institution of cinema and the material of film as superannuated. According to Foster, 'There are usually two dynamics at these new technological moments. There are artists who want to push the futuristic freedoms of new media and others who want to look at what this apparent leap forward opens up in the past, the obsolete.'¹³ This essay will deal with the implications of this second category, examining an artistic practice which has taken up the opportunity that, according to Thomas Elsaesser, the digital provided for film theorists: namely, its function as 'a zero-degree that allows one to reflect upon one's understanding of both film history and cinema theory'.¹⁴

While the presence of 16 mm film in the gallery might at first appear as a generalization of 'cinema', as a dispersal to sites and contexts that would compromise its specificity, it is my contention here that the migration of 16 mm filmmaking allows for an articulation of a new *dispositif* of cinema. By *dispositif*, I mean to suggest – following Foucault rather than Jean-Louis Baudry, whose use of the term is more familiar within film studies – a heterogeneous ensemble of material and discursive practices whose configuration is historically specific.¹⁵ In the case of Dean's work, this concept allows one to take into account how the economic and ideological determinations of the space of the gallery work in tandem with the material attributes of analogue film to produce a new and different conception of medium specificity. Within the pristine and sanctified spaces of art, 16 mm film is employed as a precious remnant of a cinema in ruins, with the film print elevated to the status of a collectible objet d'art.

Amidst rampant fears of obsolescence, the presence of 16 mm film within the gallery may be seen as an attempt for film to take shelter in the privileged and relatively autonomous zone of art, staking out the region as a new site of cinema after the end of its dominance as a form of mass culture. The architectural form of the white cube, popularized in the 1920s, is inextricably tied to the ideology of modernism and the desire for an artistic autonomy free of the contaminating tentacles of a mass culture, governed solely by market imperatives. Brian O'Doherty refers to this pristine space as a 'survival compound', suggesting the strictly policed borders it enacts between its inside (the autonomous work of art) and what is outside (the world).¹⁶ Though this conception of the gallery is eminently historical, it has as a central objective the banishment of temporal specificity, endowing the objects that reside within it with a timelessness achieved by what Mary Ann Staniszewski has termed 'the power of display'.¹⁷

13 'Round table: the projected image in contemporary art', p. 73.

14 Thomas Elsaesser, 'Early film history and multi-media: an archaeology of possible futures?', in Wendy Chun and Thomas Keenan (eds.), *Old Media, New Media: a History and Theory Reader* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 16.

15 See Michel Foucault, 'The confession of the flesh', in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1971–1977* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1980), p. 194.

16 Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: the Ideology of the Gallery Space, Expanded Edition* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 80.

17 See Mary Ann Staniszewski, *The Power of Display: a History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

18 Hollis Frampton, 'For a metahistory of film: commonplace notes and hypotheses', in *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography and Video Texts, 1968-1980* (Rochester, NY: Visual Studies Workshop Press, 1983), p. 112.

19 Bellour, 'Battle of the images', p. 59.

20 Tacita Dean, 'The Green Ray', in Rina Caravajal (ed.), *Tacita Dean: Film Works* (Milan: Edizioni Charta, 2007), p. 88.

This institutional frame produces a conception of cinema removed from its function as a leisure activity of the masses and instead aligns it with the rarefied milieu of art. If one takes seriously Hollis Frampton's claim that 'no activity can become an art until its proper epoch has ended and it has dwindled, as an aid of survival, into total obsolescence',¹⁸ there is an intimate connection between the increasing obsolescence of celluloid and its current configuration within the gallery space. Dispersed throughout the cultural field and in competition with new image regimes, the cinema finds sanctuary within the gallery – or perhaps a tomb where it might lay embalmed. As Bellour writes: 'The most twentieth-century form of art, [the cinema] is at once more crowded-in now than ever and more alone in its splendour'.¹⁹

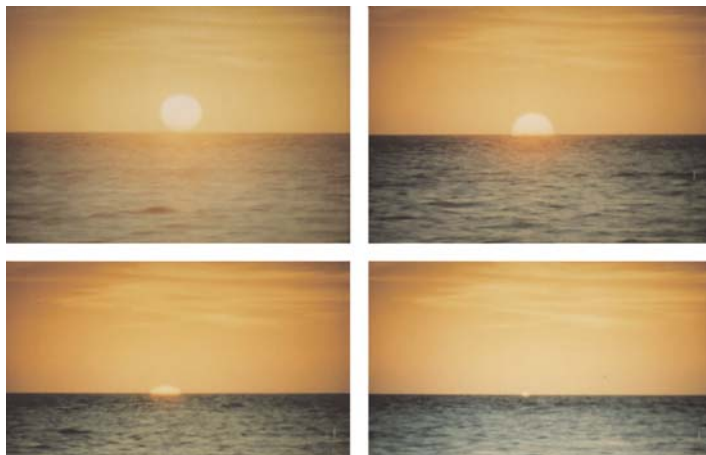
In 2001, Tacita Dean travelled to the west coast of Madagascar to film the total eclipse of the sun, a project that would later become *Diamond Ring* (2002). By chance, while she was there, she heard of a phenomenon called the 'green ray'. Often glimpsed at sea, the brief flare of green light that shoots up as the last bit of sun dips below the horizon had long been a symbol of good fortune for sailors. Morombe, Madagascar was an ideal place to sight the elusive ray, which takes place under conditions of low moisture and clear air. Also by chance, Dean had learned the evening before that Eric Rohmer had faked the effect in his *Le Rayon vert/Summer* (1986) – his cinematographer having waited some two months in the Canary Islands for every sunset before giving up and going home to the magic of postproduction – making Dean's determination to capture the ray all the stronger. Coincidence to coincidence, chance to chance, *The Green Ray* (2001) came into being. Dean describes the process of shooting as such:

The point about my film of *The Green Ray* is that it did so nearly elude me, too. As I took vigil, evening after evening, on that Morombe beach looking out across the Mozambique Channel and timing the total disappearance of the sun in a single roll of film, I believed, but was never sure, I saw it.²⁰

And indeed, the spectator is never sure, either. The film is not displayed on loop, like many of Dean's other works, but instead the 16 mm projector is fitted with a pushbutton that will begin the film at the viewer's volition. Over the course of two-and-a-half minutes, the spectator sees the golden sun sink below the horizon and waits for the fatal instant. But before one knows it, the sun is gone, the sky is dark, and the film has ended. *Did I glimpse the green ray?* Time to push the button again.

At the meeting of sun and sea, *The Green Ray* attempts to capture a rare optical phenomenon that might act as an allegory of film, that medium with a privileged access to the archivization of the chance occurrence, the ephemeral. Dean herself makes this link between the material base of *The Green Ray* and its subject. She was not alone during the filming, but was accompanied by two others who captured the event

Stills from *The Green Ray* (Tacita Dean, 2001), 16 mm colour film, mute, 2' 30". Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.



on video. Instantly replaying the footage, they insisted that their video proved that there had been no green flash and that they had witnessed, in fact, just another Mozambique sunset. Dean writes:

But when my film fragment was later processed in England, there, unmistakably, defying solid representation on a single frame of celluloid, but existent in the fleeting movement of film frames, was the green ray, having proved itself too elusive for the pixellation of the digital world.²¹

Video versus film, digital versus analogue, regularity versus contingency; *The Green Ray* mobilizes a larger problematic concerning the contemporary digitization of culture and what happens to analogue film in its wake. The film demands an investment in the revelatory capacities of celluloid, its powers of transcription, taking as its subject the possibility of 'faith and belief in what you see'.²² As Dean continues, 'This film is a document; it has become about the very fabric, material, and manufacture of film itself'.²³ Whether or not the green ray can be glimpsed in this film comes down to a leap of faith and a belief in the material of film as having a privileged access to capturing traces of time past. 'This film is a document', but a document of what? Perhaps of a fleeting optical phenomenon, but certainly of a particular moment in the history of film and the desires its makers and spectators invest in it.

For this 'faith and belief in what you see' is, certainly, a fantasmatic projection: the spectator fastens on to the ability of celluloid to render legible contingency precisely in the wake of the digital's regularity of ones and zeroes. The investment in the revelatory capacities of celluloid and a faith in its indexical guarantee must be read as a symptomatic response to anxieties surrounding the often hyperbolic claims of the ungroundedness and inherent manipulability of the digital. By virtue of approaching obsolescence, film's ability to capture ephemeral moments in the process of disappearance has been highlighted as a quality central

²¹ Ibid., p. 89.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Tacita Dean, 'Artist questionnaire: 21 responses', p. 26.

²⁵ This apocrypha might stem from Sadoul's *Histoire générale du cinéma*: 'In the background, in the garden, the leaves quivered in the sun, a detail that a spectator of today would have to make an effort to distinguish, but that filled the crowds of 1896 with enthusiasm' (translation mine). The observation that such a detail would not be remarked upon 'today' (1946) is revealing in the present context, when people are once again referring to 'the wind in the trees'. See Georges Sadoul, *Histoire générale du cinéma: Tome 1, L'Invention du cinéma, 1832–1897* (Paris: Denoël, 1946), p. 247.

²⁶ Mary Ann Doane, 'The indexical and the concept of medium specificity', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist and Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007), p. 129.

²⁷ See: Clement Greenberg, 'Modernist painting' (1960). Available online at <<http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/modernism.html>> [accessed 20 October 2009].

²⁸ As Peter Gidal writes, 'The real substance of what's being shown on film is overtaken by what it "stands for" or "represents"'. For Gidal, this means that radical filmmaking must trouble film's representational capacity by insisting on the materiality of the image; it should *document nothing*. See Peter Gidal, *Blow Job* (London: Afterall Books, 2008), p. 10.

to its specificity as a medium. Though the digital is also capable of such an operation, what is at stake in the privileging of analogue film's relationship to contingency is an investment in the medium as linked to a spectral historicity. As Dean puts it: 'So obsolescence is about time in the way film is about time: historical time, allegorical time, analogue time. I cannot be seduced by the seamlessness of digital time; like digital silence, it has a deadness.'²⁴

The chance moments of *The Green Ray* are not made present for the spectator but persist as remnants of a lost time, haunting the image in much the same way as the very presence of a 16 mm projector in a gallery functions as a sculptural relic of a collapsed regime of image registration and apprehension. *The Green Ray* stands as a document of this moment in the history of cinema every bit as much as it documents the sunset on that Madagascar evening. Examples of the link between film's medium specificity and the registration of contingency go back as far as the early spectators whose fascination in Louis Lumière's *Repas de bébé/Feeding the Baby* (1895) was less in the title action and more in the wind in the trees in the background.²⁵ Nevertheless, the frequency with which this ability has been held up in recent theory and practice as central to an ontology of the analogue moving image demands historicization and contextualization if it is to be adequately understood.

The notion of the medium put forth by *The Green Ray* strongly invokes the concept of indexicality, a category that has come to achieve crucial importance in recent discussions of the analogue–digital transition. Against the much feared capacity for manipulation that resides in the binary basis of digital media, the idea of analogue film as an indexical sign invokes a testimonial power and a sense of historicity that are seen to be weakened, if not obliterated entirely, by the new media. As Mary Ann Doane has ventured, 'One might go so far as to claim that indexicality has become today the primary indicator of cinematic specificity'.²⁶ This is to suggest a very different relationship to the category of medium specificity, which has traditionally been paired with an emphasis on the autonomy of the work of art. Clement Greenberg's suggestion that the medium engage in self-criticism so as to further entrench itself in its area of competence is a turning away from the outside world towards recursivity, a conception of the medium visible in structural film's tendency to minimize the referential capacity of cinema.²⁷ By drawing attention to the material attributes of cinema – the surface of the filmstrip, the single-frame articulation, sprocket holes, zoom, pan – structural film located film's specificity in the materiality of technology turning in on itself, not in its ability to register a trace of pastness.²⁸

Now, on the contrary, film's medium specificity lies in its ability to point beyond itself, in the assertion of its radical lack of autonomy. This shift may be seen as a move away from a concern with materiality in itself to an interrogation of the relationship between materiality and history, between the physical limits of the medium and the broader

29 Doane, 'The indexical and the concept of medium specificity', p. 133.

30 Tom Gunning, 'Moving away from the index: cinema and the impression of reality', *Differences: a Journal of Feminist and Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007), pp. 29–30.

31 Tom Gunning, 'Phantom images and modern manifestations: spirit photography, magic theatre, trick films, and photography's uncanny', in Patrice Petro (ed.), *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 42–71.

32 For the canonical formulation of this operation, see Christian Metz, 'Disavowal, fetishism', in *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, trans. Celia Britton, Annwyl Williams, Ben Brewster and Alfred Guzzetti (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977), pp. 69–78.

sociohistorical contexts in which it participates. However, this is not to suggest that the indexical guarantee is one of verisimilitude. It is important, as Doane advises in 'The indexical and the concept of medium specificity', to disentangle the iconicity from indexicality and to recognize that the indexical sign is a pointing to the real rather than any representation of it.²⁹ This pointing can be seen as a kind of trace of the real, its spectral haunting. Thus, far from providing a theoretical buttress for a belief in the unmediated presence of the image, the notion of indexicality possesses a profound relation to absence and loss, qualities that mark the palpable melancholy of Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* – perhaps the greatest formulation of the pathos of indexicality – but also a film such as *The Green Ray*. Here, the index defeats the dream of presence by pointing to something that was but is no longer, persisting only as a remnant, a trace.

Tom Gunning has vociferously questioned the usefulness of this category given that digital media can also be seen to have a connection to their referent, however mediated.³⁰ Gunning uses historical inquiry to question the truth value that has been retroactively assigned to photography relative to the ungroundedness of the digital, by arguing not only that photographs have never been trustworthy, but also that the ontology of photography is to be found as much in its magical and uncanny attributes as it is in its existential bond to its referent.³¹ In fact, these attributes of photography are by no means opposed to indexicality, which is itself closely allied with both ghostliness and the uncanny. Moreover, even if, historically speaking, photography's truth claims have always been questionable, the contemporary desires invested in the revelatory capacities of the medium must be taken seriously and interrogated as symptomatic of the current state of technological change. Dismissing them as factually erroneous does not reduce their affective resonance, as they participate in a fetishistic regime of belief rather than knowledge. The concept of disavowal has a long history in film theory, invoked in the 1970s as a way of conceptualizing the spectator's willingness to suspend disbelief and invest in the illusion of reality.³² Now, however, the complex machinations of disavowal structure a quasi-mystical investment in the powers of the photographic image: 'I know very well (that the photographic image has always been doctored and the digital can also tell the truth), but all the same (I am drawn to the photographic image, for the force of time present in it, I can't explain it, it just feels different)'. A knowledge of how the image is produced forms the ground of a complex structure of disavowal and belief that must be taken seriously and understood historically.

It is the pathos of the index, the melancholic affect of the trace, that is now summoned by the film image. This affective complex has as much or perhaps more to do with the discourses circulating around analogue film as it does with the materiality of that medium. Cinema's specificity once lay in the illusory presence of the objects onscreen, perhaps most embodied in the apocryphal story of credulous early spectators recoiling

³³ For an investigation into the mythology of this founding moment, see Tom Gunning, 'An aesthetic of astonishment: early film and the (in)credulous spectator', in Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (eds), *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings, Fifth Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 818–32.

³⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'Little history of photography', trans. Edmund Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter, in *Selected Writings, Volume Two, Part Two: 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), pp. 507–30.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

³⁶ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), p. 458.

at the oncoming train.³³ Now, however, one witnesses a shift: from presence to absence, from life to death. The affect of the index is a bittersweet commingling of a spectral presence and an inconsolable loss – the same affect felt by the cinephile who fears losing his beloved cinema. Becoming quiet, becoming venerated, 16 mm film is employed here as a reminder of novelty grown old and the sadness of acknowledging that all that once was modern will be tempered by time's senescence.

In his 1931 text, 'Little history of photography', Walter Benjamin returns to the beginnings of photography, looking at long-exposure portraiture to understand the fascination of the medium prior to its large-scale industrialization.³⁴ The historiographic impulse of the 'Little history' is to return to a moment in the past in an effort to recover the utopian potential that was held therein but dissipated by the passage of time. This unsettles any notion of historical necessity by reintroducing the centrality of contingency and posing the possibility of alternate, unfulfilled futures; but it also imparts a sense of finitude and the horror of time's impassive march. It is this constellation of hope and death, history and subjectivity, that accounts for the specificity of the photographic image. Benjamin posits a link between what he views as the historiographical imperative and the medium-specific characteristics of photography, with contingency emerging as a category vital to both. Discussing a photo taken by Karl Dauthendey of himself and his fiancée, Benjamin remarks that in old photographs,

the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the Here and Now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it.³⁵

This tiny spark of contingency – conceptualized in the preceding section according to the notion of the indexical trace – is here linked to a new way of understanding history. To rediscover in the image the forgotten future so that what is found there might be put in the service of the present – this emerges as a paramount concern in Dean's 2004 film, *Palast*.

Palast, like 2001's *Fernsehturm*, focuses on a decaying monument of the former German Democratic Republic. Here one finds an investment in the indexicality of celluloid as linked to thinking history outside of a narrative of progress – the same constellation one finds in Benjamin's discussion of the Dauthendey portrait. Dean makes use of the indexical image and the nonsynchronous temporalities that reside within it to investigate the temporal and affective complexity of Berlin's Palast der Republik. In the distance, an echo can be heard: 'The pathos of this work: there are no periods of decline'.³⁶ In *Palast*, Dean languidly documents the Palast, which was slated for destruction in 2003. The building, constructed between 1973 and 1976, was once the seat of the East German parliament. Its architectural style was typical of the DDR,

Stills from *Palast* (Tacita Dean, 2004), 16 mm colour film, with optical sound, 10' 30". Courtesy of the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London, and Marian Goodman Gallery, New York/Paris.



marking a major change from the building that had stood on the site until World War II, the Berlin Stadtschloss, a baroque palace that had formerly housed the monarchy. The East German government decided not to rebuild after the war, declaring it a remnant of Prussian imperialism and thereby making way for the construction of a monument to the socialist future. Throughout Dean's film, the literal sun metaphorically sets on the Palast, its bronze-mirrored windows emitting a golden hue, while on the soundtrack cars and pedestrians pass down the nearby Unter den Linden. The Palast, considered by many to be an eyesore, here attains a fading glory that surpasses both its contamination by asbestos (discovered just prior to Germany's 1990 reunification) and the decision by the Bundestag in 2007 to rebuild a replica of the Stadtschloss on the site, thereby overwriting history with a simulation of it.

As Dean puts it, 'Berlin needs to keep evidence of that other place, that country, and its corrupt mismanagement of a utopia that has now been

crossed out as a mistake in the reckoning of history'.³⁷ The failure of utopia, a theme that runs through Dean's work, emerges here as an attempt to make sense of Berlin's recent past. East Germany's national anthem, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen* (Resurrected from Ruins), proclaimed in its opening lines that the country was *der Zukunft zugewandt* (faced towards the future), but the collapse of the dream of this other future has now left in its wake phantoms of past trauma, and no way of conceptualizing an alternative to the contemporary status quo. *Palast* does not engage in a romantic overvaluation of a lost epoch, but calls for the necessity of remembering history's failures as well as its successes; for it is these catastrophes and defeats that, unacknowledged, haunt our present. East Germany is one such failed utopia, but the cinema itself is another. As the Palast functions as a kind of quiet *vanitas* onscreen, the small and noisy 16 mm projector sits in the middle of the gallery as a sculptural object, basking in the protection that the sanctified space of the white cube confers on all of its objects. Both the Palast and the cinema might have been left to oblivion, struck by the passive violence of forgetting, but in Dean's work both are excavated with care. Their failed futures are examined in order to ignite new hope, while simultaneously giving rein to the sadness of disappearance. Redundancy and failure are here not cast away, but cultivated and mined for their generative potential. To reject the notion of decline is to refuse a teleological conception of history as a narrative of progress, to dislodge the sense that the present that exists is the only one that could be, and therefore to reintroduce the centrality of historical contingency. For, if Guy Debord wrote that 'It is a particular society, not a particular technology that has made cinema what it is. Cinema could have been historical analyses, theories, essays, memories',³⁸ Dean responds that, yes, cinema could have been all of these things; but in the margins, it might have been so all along. And with some effort, perhaps it still might be.

38 Guy Debord, 'In girum imus nocte et consumimur igni (1978)', *Guy Debord, Complete Cinematic Works: Scripts, Stills, Documents*, trans. Ken Knabb (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2003), pp. 145–46 (translation modified).

39 Giuliana Bruno, *Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 82.

The ruin is a central trope throughout Dean's work, but figures especially strongly in *Bubble House* (1999), *Fernsehturm*, *Kodak* (2006), *Palast*, *Section Cinéma* (2002) and *Teignmouth Electron* (1999), all of which document physical ruins of varying sorts through the ruined medium of film. Though Giuliana Bruno asserts that we live in an age 'repelled by ruination',³⁹ Andreas Huyssen sees an obsession with ruins as becoming pervasive over the last fifteen years, a time that witnessed both the flowering of the internet and wireless technologies in a burst of technological novelty, as well as an increasing desperation following the collapse of the USSR that there can be no alternative to global capitalism. As Huyssen writes,

This contemporary obsession with ruins hides a nostalgia for an earlier age that had not yet lost its power to imagine other futures. At stake is a nostalgia for modernity that dare not speak its name after acknowledging the catastrophes of the twentieth century and the lingering injuries of inner and outer colonization. Yet this nostalgia

40 Andreas Huyssen, 'Nostalgia for ruins', *Grey Room*, no. 23 (2006), p. 7.

41 Michael Newman, 'Sauvetage', in *Tacita Dean: Seven Books – Essays* (Paris: Éditions des Musées de la Ville de Paris/Steidl Publishers, 2003), np.

42 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 209.

43 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), p.151.

44 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1985), p.178.

45 Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 211.

persists, straining for something lost with the ending of an earlier form of modernity. The cipher for this nostalgia is the ruin.⁴⁰

Michael Newman has emphasized the centrality of the figure of the collector to Dean's work, making use of Benjamin's theory of collecting to do so.⁴¹ For Benjamin, the collector is he who orchestrates 'the liberation of things from the drudgery of being useful', freeing the commodity from the imperatives of the market.⁴² Though aligned with the possibility of redeeming these fallen objects, what must be emphasized is that, like so many of the figures that populate Benjamin's writing, the collector is a character marked by a profound ambivalence. Torn from context, the collected object enters a spatial organization frozen in time. Calling the collection a 'paradise of consumption', Susan Stewart describes it as, 'replac[ing] history with *classification*, with an order beyond temporality'.⁴³

By contrast, in the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin writes that 'Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things',⁴⁴ and it is precisely this relationship, and not solely that of the collector, that must be summoned to deal with the ways in which Dean mobilizes notions of history and obsolescence. While acknowledging that, true to the antinomic patterns of his thought, 'more important than all the differences that may exist between them – in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector', the allegorist is the 'polar opposite' of the collector, retaining the historical specificity of the detritus she/he encounters but wrenching it from the continuum so as to make it enter relationships – in the manner of cinematic montage – with other elements.⁴⁵ Allegory allows for an understanding of the passage of objects through time, as well as the historical and affective resonances that this entails.

For the allegorist is the reader of ruins, excavator of the remnants of the past in the light of the present. Unlike the collector, the allegorist does not attempt to defeat time but instead interrogates nonsynchronous temporalities, confronting head-on the admixture of hope and dread that Benjamin read in the Dauthendey portrait. In her allegories of cinema, Dean refuses a totalizable system – that great dream of the collector in which every object would have its place and every place would have its object. Rather, the cinema has been scattered, its legibility as a coherent object fractured. It is amidst these ruins that the allegorist wanders, producing from their aggregation of temporalities provisional readings of what this constellation 'cinema' might be, to which anxieties it might respond, or which desires it might elicit. This distinction between collection and allegory gets to the heart of how cinema has been reconceptualized in contemporary gallery film practices. For while celluloid certainly functions as a technology of preservation in this context, it would be naive to see the fact of filming as having saved these objects from the ruination of time. Cinema itself is, in Dean's conception, a fragile ruin: it is fit to capture such objects for it shares in their stature.

⁴⁶ Svetlana Boym, 'Tatlin, or, ruinophilia', *Cabinet*, no. 28 (2007–08), p. 44.

Though Newman's notion of 'rescue' is persuasive in relation to some of Dean's nonfilmic work, works such as *Palast* and *Kodak* – her elegiac meditation on the cessation of 16 mm film production at a Kodak factory in Chalon-sur-Saône – engage in something much closer to Huyssen's 'nostalgia for ruins' and, more specifically, in a nostalgia for the ruined dreams of twentieth-century modernity. The ruin has the passage of time engraved on its very surface, indexing the movements of change and stasis with a fragile persistence that is becoming increasingly rare as digital novelty triumphs. The 'seamlessness' Dean sees as characterizing the digital must be opposed to the heterogeneous temporality of the ruin and the desires it engenders. Svetlana Boym asserts that, 'The early twenty-first century exhibits a strange ruinophilia, a fascination with ruins that goes beyond postmodern quotation marks. In our increasingly digital age, ruins appear as an endangered species, as physical embodiments of modern paradoxes reminding us of the blunders of modern technologies and technologies alike.'⁴⁶ Boym makes the link explicit whereas Huyssen does not: this contemporary 'ruinophilia' is linked to anxieties around digitization and inextricably tied to failures both technological and social. A sort of reaction formation, in the context of an overproduction of novelty it is the superannuated that fascinates.

In examining the contemporary proliferation of digital devices that function as so many bodily prostheses, one's gaze drifts back to the cinema, which suddenly appears different. Quite other than conceptions of film's specificity throughout the twentieth century, variously allied with novelty, speed and ineluctable presence, now cinema lies in ruins, invested with the curiosity and care that the ruin elicits. This can be dismissed as 'nothing but nostalgia', or as the product of a dangerous romanticization, but that would be to fail to take seriously some of the most stimulating non-narrative film practices today, and also to exhibit disinterest in attempting to understand precisely why and how the analogue and the obsolete fascinate so incontrovertibly. In these practices, the cinema is seen as an apparatus that cannot be absolved of its sins and betrayals but that must be dismantled and reassembled, anatomized and examined for its successes and shortcomings – like all the failed utopias of the twentieth century. Transfigured by the light of technological change, it is now a privileged locus of historicity and takes on something it was once said to destroy: aura.

Like an angel at apotheosis, the now seraphic cinema gains an ethereal halo within the gallery. Salvaged from the ruins of twentieth-century mass culture, in which it had figured as an agent of image proliferation and circulation, within the white cube the cinema becomes precious. Instead of engaging the inherent capability of the medium as mechanically reproducible, 16 mm gallery practice marshals an economy of purposeful rarity, restricting production of film prints to a limited edition, most often of between three and six copies, which are then sold by commercial galleries as collectible objets d'art. On this front, one cannot help but ask if there is a reason to be suspicious of the patina

attached to film in the gallery. What is one to make of this indulgence in the fetishization of rarity? For if the cinema is liberated from utility to enter into the disinterestedness of aesthetic contemplation, it simultaneously enters a new circuit of exchange and commodification: the art market.

In his most famous essay, Benjamin stated that 'what withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the latter's aura', and specified film as the primary agent in this liquidation.⁴⁷ Here, the aura is defined in an antithetical relationship to film, except for when one confronts the 'false aura' of the commodity, epitomized for Benjamin in the closeup of the movie star. Nonetheless, Benjamin retains an investment in the revolutionary potential of the medium of film. This investment must be understood as twofold: firstly, film's destruction of aura has a positive valence, for it liquidates the categories of bourgeois aesthetics, a notion encapsulated in Benjamin's discussion of Dada; and secondly, the shock effects of film might help negotiate the traumatic effects of modernity, since its tactile visuality allows access to another nature than that accessible to the naked eye. Benjamin names this realm the 'optical unconscious', a concept which is closely tied to indexicality and the ability to gain access to nonsynchronous temporalities.⁴⁸ The task at hand is to evaluate how these two investments in the medium appear to us today.

To take up the first postulate, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it must be said that film has not so much aided in the destruction of traditional aesthetic values as it has been recuperated into them, thus neutralizing Benjamin's first hope for the medium. When the historical avant garde made films, the aim was to utilize technological media to critique the increasing autonomy of the work of art.⁴⁹ When the Fluxus group produced the first limited-edition 8 mm and 16 mm films as a part of their Fluxboxes in the 1960s, once again the goal was to intervene in the ideological status of the work of art by insisting on the multiple as a form of artistic production. The contemporary situation sees an inversion of Fluxus's use of the limited-edition film print. For Fluxus, the use of film was a way to bring art to the level of the quotidian and the reproducible, to defeat its autonomy and uniqueness. Now, however, the limited edition is used to elevate the film print to the status of art object, recuperating it into the economy that it once compromised. This becomes possible at this historical juncture in large part due to the increasing obsolescence of the medium. As Whitney Museum curators Chrissie Iles and Henriette Huldish put it, while the use of the film limited edition is not new, 'it is significant that many younger artists choose to work in a mode that treats film as object. This trend has everything to do with the ready availability on the consumer market of digital recording and editing devices that assert the medium of film as a precious, non-commercial material.'⁵⁰

In a similar vein, in his attempt to differentiate between experimental film and gallery film as modes of production, Jonathan Walley writes

47 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility', p. 254.

48 Ibid., p. 254, pp. 266–67.

49 This is the position of Peter Bürger, who argues that the avant garde negates the following determinations essential to autonomous art: the disjunction of art and the praxis of life, individual production, individual reception and reception as detached from production. The use of film can be seen as an important intervention in the first three of these four postulates. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 53.

50 Chrissie Iles and Henriette Huldish, 'Keeping time: on collecting film and video art in the museum,' in Bruce Altshuler (ed.), *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 81.

51 Jonathan Walley, 'Modes of film practice in the avant garde', in Tanya Leighton (ed.), *Art and the Moving Image: a Critical Reader* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), p. 187.

52 Paul Young, 'Black Box White Cube', *Art and Auction* (February 2008). <<http://www.artinfo.com/news/story/26655/black-box-white-cube/>> [accessed 20 September 2009].

53 Scott MacDonald, '16 mm: reports of its death are greatly exaggerated', *Cinema Journal*, vol. 45, no. 3 (2006), p. 128.

54 In Spring 2009, Marian Goodman Gallery in New York offered Tacita Dean's *Michael Hamburger* (2007) for €80,000 and her *Darmstädter Werkblock* (2007) for €60,000.

55 Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility', p. 261.

that, 'Simply put, artists' film regards the film print as an art object in a way that avant-garde cinema does not'.⁵¹ Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat* (2006), for example, was issued by the Los Angeles-based gallery Blum and Poe in a boxed edition of six, comprising nineteen photographic prints and each of the film's twelve long takes on a different reel of film. The object was priced in six figures.⁵² Issuing editions of this kind and including supplementary materials such as still photographs has become standard practice within the art world. Scott MacDonald, who reports that an edition of Lockhart's thirty-two-minute film, *No* (2003) was available from the Barbara Gladstone Gallery in New York for \$30,000, is hopeful that the popularity of the 16 mm limited-edition artist's film will lead to an increased interest in collecting 16 mm prints of experimental films: 'No, and Lockhart's films in general, are often evocative of the films of James Benning, Morgan Fisher, and other filmmakers whom Lockhart herself considers her mentors. It is only a matter of time before the work of these mentors is accorded a similar level of financial respect that Lockhart's films receive.'⁵³

Perhaps; and it would be lovely, indeed. But MacDonald's reasoning here is faulty, for he proposes that work of aesthetic similarity (here, the relationship between Lockhart and her mentors) should logically command a financial similarity. Rather, what is at stake is not an aesthetic criterion of value, but rather the vast difference in the distribution models espoused by these two sectors of film production. Experimental cinema has historically depended on a licensing model based on depositing prints with a distributor that then rents the prints according to a per-screening fee. Gallery film, by contrast, goes against the capacity for reproducibility inherent in the medium, thereby artificially rendering back to film a quality of auratic distance. It becomes a privileged experience to be present before a Tacita Dean film, to share a room with it for a particular duration of time, and an even more privileged experience to purchase one of four editions in existence at a cost of €80,000.⁵⁴ One must sound a cautionary note regarding the manner in which the enforced scarcity of the limited-edition model of distribution contributes to the values of preciousness and antiquation one sees attached to celluloid film within the gallery. For in this sense, the becoming-auratic of film is not unlike the false aura of the movie star – a perfidious halo that smacks of the 'putrid magic' of the commodity.⁵⁵

However, we have yet to take account of what happened to Benjamin's second investment in the medium of film, specified above as linked to the possibilities of the optical unconscious. Though film has been thoroughly recuperated into the ever-redoubtable categories of bourgeois aesthetics, this second wager of film's potential might find itself ratified, rather than compromised, by the contemporary situation of film in the gallery. As Miriam Hansen has noted, understanding aura merely as a category of traditional aesthetics that might falsely be resurrected through technology rests on a reductive reading of Benjamin. Instead, Hansen excavates Benjamin's use of the concept to recover its multivalent

56 'The notion of aura as a premonition of future catastrophe harks back to medical theories since antiquity. . . . For Benjamin, the ominous aspect of aura belongs to the realm of the daemonic, in particular the phenomenon of self-alienating encounters with an older, other self. In a technologically refracted, specifically modern form, this aspect of aura resurfaces in his notion of an optical unconscious, which he unfolds from the passage about the Dauthendey portrait.' See Miriam Hansen, 'Benjamin's aura', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2008), p. 342.

57 Ibid., p. 347.

58 Notably, the 'atmosphere' discussed here is precisely the aura Hansen seeks to recover throughout her essay. In the original German, 'atmosphäre' is rendered not with the more scientific *Atmosphäre*, but with *Stimmung*, suggesting a more figurative usage linked to tone, feeling or mood – in short, it describes the affective pull of the outmoded object. See Walter Benjamin, 'Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia', trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Selected Writings, Volume Two, Part One: 1927–1930*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1999), p. 210; Walter Benjamin, 'Der Surrealismus: Die letzte Momentaufnahme der europäischen Intelligenz', *Angelus Novus: Ausgewählte Schriften 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966), p. 205.

meanings, emphasizing that in fact aura – of a related but different variety – is precisely the concept that describes the affective complex encountered in the Dauthendey portrait discussed in the 'Little History'.⁵⁶ This conception of aura is intimately linked to the indexical trace, the disjunctive temporalities that reside therein, and the relationship these qualities set up to the viewing subject, all of which are exploited in contemporary gallery film in a manner markedly absent from other sectors of filmmaking. Hansen explores connections between auratic distance and the melancholy of lost time, seeing the defining elements of the aura as 'its sudden and fleeting disruption of linear time, its uncanny linkage of past and future – and the concomitant dislocation of the subject'.⁵⁷

In short, in this conception the aura is no longer defined as antithetical to technological media, but takes on a more nuanced relationship to it. The affective complex that has been discussed throughout this essay as central to the idea of the medium put forth in contemporary gallery film is here named aura. Thus, if through their emphasis on the film print as rare object Dean's films partake of the false aura of the commodity, in their meditations on history, time and desire they nonetheless partake of this other aura – an aura linked to contingency and historicity. Retrieved from the teleological narrative of history, the cinema emerges as a superannuated technology, a ruin to be explored so as perhaps to release what Benjamin saw the Surrealists as having discovered: 'the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded"'. Dean, too, 'bring[s] the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed in these things to the point of explosion', questioning the hollow promises of technological novelty to ask: 'What form do you suppose a life would take that was determined at a decisive moment precisely by the street song last on everyone's lips?'⁵⁸

A life determined solely by the latest popular jingle would be impoverished, indeed, for it would reside solely within the perpetual novelty that is endemic to the motor of capitalism's market. Trapped in a perpetual present, it would see the past products of this system, no longer tinged with the gleam that coats the ever-same with the veneer of the ever-new, fall into total oblivion. Instead, Benjamin is an advocate for a life and an artistic practice informed by the complex affects that lie dormant within the discarded objects of mass culture, for it is in them that history resides. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, one witnesses the dissolution of the cinema as a coherent *dispositif* into a multiplicity of new configurations that render it difficult to legislate over what counts as properly a part of it. Hollywood's products maintain a worldwide visibility, available in more formats and locations than ever before, but they are more often consumed in domestic situations on digital formats than on celluloid in the ritualistic space of the movie theatre.

Given such a situation, one glimpses a palpable act of mourning for a lost image regime and a lost relationship to time that it made possible. As

such, the sense of deathliness found within the concept of indexicality references not merely a haunting of the image by a lost past, but is also symptomatic of the presence of another spectre: that of the cinema itself. Indexicality thus indicates both death *in* the image and a death *of* the image. The rallies to analogue specificity thus attest to a kind of love at last sight, a desire to protect a threatened cinema, to cocoon it. This is a kind of cinephilia that is far from that of the Tarantino-esque video store clerk. Instead, it is a cinephilia that invests in the material of celluloid as evincing a privileged link to time, history and finitude. In the work of an artist like Dean, the economic and institutional powers of contemporary art operate in concert to produce more fully this notion of a disappearing cinema gifted with an ability to document disappearing things.

This emphasis on the role played by the architectural, economic and institutional determinations of contemporary art points to the fact that the dialectical movement visible here is not merely between medium specificity and digital convergence, but also between the material limits of the medium and its placement within the institutional and discursive determinations of a larger *dispositif*. For the material base of the image certainly matters to Dean, but not for its own sake; rather, what is interrogated here is the way in which the constraints of materiality dialectically interact with the medium's ability to engage with the social and the historical. Central to this tension is the important role which fears of obsolescence play in the current conceptualization of the medium of film. The impassioned rhetoric that currently surrounds the death of cinema may be just that: rhetoric. However, its affective truth and its centrality to understanding the contemporary prevalence of cinema within the gallery are undeniable. For when Dean obsessively attempts to grab hold of the green ray as it flashes up on the horizon, she is equally attempting to grab hold of cinema itself, to register its contingencies as it slips away.

- 1 When I enquired about *Three Ring Circus* in 2001 the BBC had only a 16 mm film negative and no viewing copy. After a subsequent enquiry from John Hill, Kathleen Dickson at the National Film and Television Archive acquired a VHS copy from the BBC and I viewed it for the first time in 2005.
- 2 For histories of television drama before the 1970s, see John Caughie, 'Before the Golden Age: early television drama', in John Corner (ed.), *Popular Television in Britain* (London: British Film Institute, 1991), pp. 22–41, and *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Charles Barr, "'They think it's all over': the dramatic legacy of live television", in John Hill and Martin McLoone (eds), *Big Picture, Small Screen: the Relations Between Film and Television* (Luton: University of Luton Press/John Libbey, 1997), pp. 47–75; Jason Jacobs, *The Intimate Screen: Early British Television Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Lez Cooke, *British Television Drama: a History* (London: British Film Institute, 2003). On the unavailability of programmes, see Steve Bryant, *The Television Heritage* (London: British Film Institute, 1989); Dick Fiddy, *Missing, Believed Wiped: Searching for the Lost Treasures of British Television* (London: British Film Institute, 2001).
- 3 See Lez Cooke, 'Unknown TV classics', *Critical Studies in Television Online*, July 2009. <<http://criticalstudiesintelevison.com/index.php?siid=11411>> [accessed 20 September 2009].
- 4 MacTaggart's significant contribution to British television

Three Ring Circus: the ur-text of modernist television drama

LEZ COOKE

Three Ring Circus was the winner of a 1960 BBC Scotland television play competition, earning its author, Jack Gerson, a first prize of £500. Along with two other prizewinning scripts, the play was subsequently produced by BBC Scotland and transmitted on the BBC television network on Thursday 2 February 1961, from 8.45 to 9.45 pm. Yet the significance of *Three Ring Circus* has been somewhat overlooked in the history of British television drama; until recently, there was no viewing copy available and the play had not been screened, to the best of my knowledge, since its original transmission.¹ The unavailability of many programmes, either because they were transmitted live and not telerecorded or because recordings were subsequently wiped or destroyed, is an obvious factor in the partial history of television drama before the 1970s.² *Three Ring Circus* was pre-telerecorded on 27 October 1960, three months before its transmission, which seems to have guaranteed its survival, for while the original transmission print may have been destroyed or lost, BBC Scotland retained the 16 mm negative of the telerecording.

Three Ring Circus is important not only as an 'unknown' television drama³ from a time when there were only two television channels in the UK, but because it may well be the founding text – the 'ur-drama' – in a tradition of innovative, modernist television drama at the BBC in the early 1960s. Moreover, at a time when the writer was seen as the primary creative figure in television drama, the production of Jack Gerson's prizewinning script made a reputation for its director, James MacTaggart, rather than for its writer, and it is his name that has become legendary in television history.⁴ The production of *Three Ring Circus* is

was acknowledged, following his early death at the age of 46, when the MacTaggart Memorial Lecture was established at the Edinburgh Festival in 1976, since when the MacTaggart Lecture has become the centrepiece of the annual Edinburgh International Television Festival.

significant technically for its modernist experimentation with still images at a time when the impetus to shift television drama away from naturalism remained somewhat studio bound. This essay explores *Three Ring Circus* in the light of these various dimensions of significance.

Donald Wilson, Head of the BBC Script Department at the beginning of the 1960s and one of the three judges of the BBC Scotland play competition, wrote in the *Radio Times* when *Three Ring Circus* was transmitted:

There was a total of 358 entries for the first Scottish television play competition, which took place a year ago. The manuscripts, which came in every variety of length, style, and state of preservation, had at least one thing in common: they were the work of writers who had never achieved production on the television screen. This condition was laid down in the rules, because the object of this competition – as it is of all such contests sponsored by the BBC – was to seek out new talent, and by encouragement direct it towards a rewarding outlet within the country of its origin. It is for this reason that the three prize-winning plays, *Three Ring Circus*, *Job Adam*, and *Pack Up Your Troubles*, will all be produced in our Scottish studios.⁵

5 Donald Wilson, 'Three Ring Circus', *Radio Times*, 26 January 1961, p. 46.

6 MacTaggart was credited as the 'producer' on *Three Ring Circus* but was effectively the director, at a time when the BBC made no distinction between the two roles.

7 The Assistant Head of Television Drama, Norman Rutherford, wrote to R.G.T. Gildard, Head of Programmes, Scotland, on 19 May 1961, asking to 'borrow MacTaggart from beginning of June to mid-August' to produce 'a series of six magazine stories on the lines of our recent programme "Element of Doubt". The aim is to find "strong" narrative material and then present it in essence without scenery and in close-up, and on a very restricted budget.' The Drama Department in London thought MacTaggart was 'clearly the best man for the job' and that it would 'give him a set of opportunities from which he ... would unmistakably benefit'. BBC Written Archives Centre, T5/2239/4.

8 See Lez Cooke, *Troy Kennedy Martin* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 60–68.

While Gerson received the prize for *Three Ring Circus*, it was the innovative direction of MacTaggart that was noted in the BBC Drama Department in London,⁶ leading to an invitation for him to join the department to work on a new 'experimental' series being developed by the writer Troy Kennedy Martin.⁷ The series on which MacTaggart and Kennedy Martin collaborated was transmitted in the summer of 1961 under the anthology title *Storyboard*.⁸ It was the first of several anthology play series that MacTaggart worked on as producer, director and occasionally writer over the next few years, before his untimely death in 1974 at the age of forty-six.

In his introduction to *Three Ring Circus* in the *Radio Times*, Donald Wilson went on to explain what he and his fellow judges, Clemence Dane and Neil Paterson, were looking for (and not looking for) in assessing the twelve plays selected by 'a small reading panel' from the 358 entries submitted:

What were we looking for? Certainly not for the expert construction of a Pinero, the intellectual brilliance of a Shaw, or the polished dialogue of a Rattigan. Any possessor of these qualities would already have a well-known name. But talent, however immature, is immediately apparent; even the 'prentice playwright can demonstrate a sense of character, an instinct for dramatic crisis, a perceptive ear for the word to be spoken, the gift of imaginative observation.

As I recall, none of us had any doubt that J.B. Gerson was endowed with these qualities, and there was little argument about who should be awarded the first prize. His *Three Ring Circus* is a piece of imaginative writing, a fantasy if you like, certainly a parable of modern times; and

9 Wilson, 'Three Ring Circus', pp. 46–7.

10 Unpublished interviews with the author recorded in April 2000 (Smith and McGrath) and April 2003 (Kennedy Martin). See Cooke, *Troy Kennedy Martin*, pp. 56–7, for Kennedy Martin's reference to the 'young Turks' working under Donald Wilson in the BBC Script Department between 1959 and 1961.

11 Talking in April 2000 about this early 1960s period of experimentation at the BBC, John McGrath told me: 'The kind of ur-drama from that whole line was a thing called *Three Ring Circus*, which was done in Glasgow ... and directed by Jimmy MacTaggart and it was on the basis of *Three Ring Circus* that Jimmy was brought down to London to direct and one of the first things that happened was of course that we all nobbled Jimmy 'cos he was trying to do something ...' Unpublished interview with the author, 27 April 2000.

12 John Hill, "'Creative in its own right": the Langham Group and the search for a new television drama', in Laura Mulvey and Jamie Sexton (eds), *Experimental British Television* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 17–30.

13 Troy Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home: first statement of a new drama for television', *Encore*, no. 48 (1964), p. 21.

14 Hill, "'Creative in its own right"', p. 24.

perhaps its greatest virtue – a vital one in this kind of play – is its power to stimulate the imagination of those concerned in its production. All of them – actors, designer, technicians, and above all the producer, James MacTaggart, have been inspired to a notable creative effort. I find the result a most compelling, vivid, and exciting piece of television.⁹

Wilson was not alone in this opinion. Three of the 'young Turks' working in the BBC Script Department at the time – Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath and Roger Smith – have cited *Three Ring Circus* as a hugely influential drama.¹⁰ Indeed, McGrath went so far as to describe the play as the 'ur-drama' in a line of experimental television drama at the BBC in the early 1960s, extending through *Storyboard* (1961), *Studio 4* (1962), *Teletale* (1963–64) and *Diary of a Young Man* (1964) to *The Wednesday Play* (1964–70), on all of which MacTaggart worked as producer and/or director.¹¹

The precedent for experimentation in television drama at the BBC in the late 1950s and early 1960s was set by the Langham Group, an experimental drama unit established in 1958. In its short existence (the group disbanded in 1960), the Langham Group was responsible for just three productions: *The Torrents of Spring* (tx. 21 May 1959), *Mario* (tx. 15 December 1959) and *On the Edge* (tx. 16 July 1960), but, as John Hill has argued,¹² the work of the group merits more attention than it has received, having been dismissed by Troy Kennedy Martin in his influential 'Nats go home' article as 'an art set-up ... propitiated on the altar of prestige'.¹³ According to Hill,

many of the elements subsequently championed by critics of the Langham Group, such as Troy Kennedy Martin, may, in fact, be found in the group's productions ... the plays involved a deliberate reduction in dialogue, much less emphasis on the close-up and the photographing of faces, considerable freeing-up of the camera as well as the use of techniques designed to give outward expression to internal emotional states. The productions were also distinguished by their use of montage and, in the case of *Mario*, directly anticipate the kind of montage involving stills employed in Troy Kennedy Martin's *Diary of a Young Man* (1964).¹⁴

James MacTaggart would certainly have been aware of the work of the Langham Group. Indeed, the studio scenes in *Three Ring Circus* are stylistically similar to the complicated, long-take camera setups in the only surviving Langham Group drama, *The Torrents of Spring*. This sixty-minute dramatization of a short novel by Turgenev utilized a single-camera technique as opposed to the multi-camera approach more common in studio drama at the time, resulting in very long takes and a remarkable mobility in the camerawork.

The director of *The Torrents of Spring*, Anthony Pelissier (credited as the producer), wanted to develop a new style for television drama and to

15 Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home', p. 25.

16 Ibid.

17 Hill, "'Creative in its own right'", p. 23

18 Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home', p. ??

19 McGrath, unpublished interview with the author, 27 April 2000.

20 Ian Atkins, memorandum to Anthony Pelissier, 22 February 1956, BBC Written Archives Centre, T31/292.

get away from the 'talking heads' approach of naturalist studio drama, in which, as Kennedy Martin later wrote, 'the director is forced into photographing faces talking and faces reacting'.¹⁵ While the search for a new style may have been the motivation for both Pelissier and Kennedy Martin, the emphasis on long sequence-shots in *The Torrents of Spring* was diametrically opposed to Kennedy Martin's call to 'free the structure from natural time',¹⁶ because the adoption of a single-camera long-take technique inevitably meant an adherence to real time.

Pelissier did incorporate a montage sequence into *The Torrents of Spring*, as he did also in the second Langham Group production, *Mario*. But whereas Kennedy Martin envisaged the use of montage as a non-naturalistic technique and was clearly interested in exploring how Eisenstein's theories of montage could be utilized in the creation of a new television drama, Pelissier used montage for a more self-consciously 'aesthetic' purpose, as John Hill notes:

Pelissier was an admirer of Eisenstein and the use of short montage sequences in both *The Torrents of Spring* and *Mario* complements the long takes that were otherwise the productions' main feature. However, although stylistically dissimilar, camera movement and montage are exploited for broadly similar ends. Just as the camera focuses on a specific object or visual detail (such as legs or a reflection) in the course of its movement, so montage is used to link images that are concentrated upon small details or actions.¹⁷

It may be this attention to aesthetic detail in the work of the Langham Group that led Kennedy Martin to dismiss it as 'an art set-up'.¹⁸ In contrast, Kennedy Martin wanted to develop a new grammar for television drama in order to breach the constraints of naturalism, while still appealing to a popular audience. This he attempted to do in the experimental dramas he worked on in the early 1960s, especially the *Storyboard* plays and *Diary of a Young Man*. John McGrath later summarized the difference between the Langham Group's experiments and those of Kennedy Martin in the following terms: 'You see what Troy brought to it which the Langham Group didn't have, Troy was very good at attracting a mass audience. His storylines were commercial in today's parlance.'¹⁹

The development of television as a medium, forty years after the birth of cinema, resulted in a delayed response to modernism as an early twentieth-century impetus in the arts. Whereas modernist artists such as Duchamp, Leger and Man Ray were experimenting with film in the 1920s, it was another thirty years before a proposal was made within the BBC Drama Department to set up a small subcommittee to 'chew over the problem of experimental Television programmes',²⁰ leading to the establishment of the Langham Group as a 'Drama Experimental Unit' in December 1958, twenty-two years after the launch of the BBC television service. Even in the late 1950s, when the Langham Group, and subsequently James MacTaggart, Troy Kennedy Martin, John McGrath,

21 As Helen Wheatley has shown, some experimentation was taking place in ITV drama in the late 1950s and early 1960s in anthology series such as ABC's *Armchair Theatre* and *Armchair Mystery Theatre*, but this experimentation did not tend to embrace the forms of modernist experimentation with which Pelissier, MacTaggart, Kennedy Martin and others were concerned at the BBC. In this regard the BBC provided an opportunity for experimentation to a greater extent than was generally possible within the ITV companies. See Helen Wheatley, 'Putting the mystery back into *Armchair Theatre*', *Journal of British Cinema and Television*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2004), pp. 197–210; and Helen Wheatley, 'And now for your Sunday night experimental drama . . .': experimentation and *Armchair Theatre*', in Mulvey and Sexton (eds), *Experimental British Television*, pp. 31–47.

22 The *Storyboard* plays were transmitted live from July to September 1961, and while Troy Kennedy Martin's next project, *Z Cars*, was also a live studio drama, it was notable for including many telecine sequences of prerecorded scenes filmed on location.

23 John Caughie, *Television Drama: Realism, Modernism and British Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 152–78.

24 Kennedy Martin was clearly conscious of the 'new waves' in European cinema at the time of writing 'Nats go home', making specific reference to Resnais and 'the new film wave' in discussing how 'a whole generation of artists have striven to destroy the conventional bonds which tie the audience to the drama'. See Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home', p. 29.

et al. tried to introduce elements of modernism into television, the formal realization of a modernist style was complicated by the technological changes taking place. Television drama evolved from live studio drama (with occasional film inserts), to prerecorded studio drama (following the introduction of videotape in 1958), to drama recorded on location – initially on videotape, then on film – which brought a new aesthetic to television drama in the 1960s, evident in dramas such as *Diary of a Young Man* (part film/part studio) and the Ken Loach/Tony Garnett *Wednesday Play, Up the Junction* (tx. 3 November 1965), which was filmed almost entirely on location.²¹

Whereas the experimentation of the Langham Group invoked the 'high modernism' of the European avant garde, MacTaggart's inclusion of rapid montages of still images in *Three Ring Circus*, alongside complex studio takes recorded on minimal 'expressionist' sets, suggests the influence of a cinematic modernism associated with Eisenstein and the avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s. The dual style of *Three Ring Circus* – long takes recorded electronically in the television studio, plus montage sequences comprising still images recorded on film – highlights the technological rift in television drama at the time of its production, in autumn 1960, between live studio drama and prerecorded filmed drama.²² While the Langham Group tried to create an avant-garde television drama within the constraints of live studio drama, using long takes, unusual camera angles, extreme closeups, bare or minimal sets and multilayered sound, *Three Ring Circus* combined these innovations with the kind of modernist fragmentation that was only really possible by editing on film, enabling rapid montages of still images to be included in television drama for the first time.

As John Caughie has argued, the terms in which this experimental tradition in television drama have been discussed, especially in relation to Kennedy Martin's 'Nats go home' polemic, are those of non-naturalism rather than modernism, partly because 'naturalism' was the focus of Kennedy Martin's attack in his article.²³ As Caughie points out, 'modernism' has been a more problematic term for television criticism because of its 'high art' associations. 'Modernism' in the other arts was associated with the avant garde, but the new generation of progressive writers, producers and directors in the BBC Drama Department were interested in television as a popular medium, capable of attracting a mass audience – hence Kennedy Martin's dismissal of the Langham Group as 'an art set-up . . . propitiated on the altar of prestige'. *Z Cars*, which Kennedy Martin was developing in 1961 at the same time as working on the *Storyboard* plays, was one of the most popular programmes on British television in the early 1960s. So it is perhaps understandable that he did not refer to 'modernism', with its elitist connotations, in 'Nats go home'. Instead he called for a 'New Drama', effectively a 'new wave' of television drama, stressing the need for the introduction of new techniques, but in doing so he invoked Brecht, Eisenstein and Resnais – unequivocally 'modernists' in the parallel arts of theatre and cinema.²⁴

It could be argued that the Langham Group wanted to ‘modernize’ traditional storytelling with their experiments in television drama, but in doing so they drew on a ‘high art’ tradition of European literature, adapting Turgenev and Thomas Mann for their first two productions. Furthermore, they were constrained by television drama’s theatrical legacy and by the available technology. Four years later, Kennedy Martin insisted that television drama must throw off its theatrical heritage and embrace new technology: ‘All drama which owes its form or substance to theatre plays is OUT’; ‘The new drama . . . must employ new techniques, like Mobile Ampex’.²⁵ Clearly, for Kennedy Martin, the experiments of the Langham Group had not gone far enough in the pursuit of ‘a New Drama for Television’.

While *Three Ring Circus* retains some European ‘high art’ influences in Gerson’s story – most notably by drawing on existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd in its story of a man searching for his own identity who becomes caught up in absurd situations – MacTaggart’s breakthrough was to introduce two montages of still images, recorded on film. It was probably this that most excited the ‘young Turks’ in the BBC script department, rather than the more elaborately staged studio sequences which had been a feature of the Langham Group productions. In both the Langham Group plays and *Three Ring Circus* the studio sequences draw on the ‘theatrical’ tradition of live studio drama, albeit with unusually mobile camerawork, playing out in real time. In *Three Ring Circus* on the other hand, the film sequences compress time through elliptical montages of photographic stills, most notably in the central montage sequence which lasts for nearly two minutes.

The first montage sequence comes at the very beginning of the play. Circus music accompanies a blank screen for a few seconds before the appearance of a caption, handwritten in chalk on a grey background, inviting us to ‘Watch This Space’. After another black screen, the first still image appears: a photograph of clowns in a circus ring. This is followed by further still images of clowns, each image appearing on screen for about a second. Then a cut to a noir-ish image of a man, seen in long shot, wearing a raincoat, walking along a city street. With this image the circus music stops, to be replaced by the sound of the man’s footsteps as he advances, in elliptical stop-motion, along the street, the stop-motion images synchronized with the sound of each footstep. Then the circus music resumes as still images of circus performers on horseback appear, followed by more stop-motion images of the man accompanied by the sound of his footsteps. Up until this point, four images of circus performers have alternated with four stop-motion images of the man, but now, nearly thirty seconds into this title sequence, the intercutting between circus ring and street speeds up as two still images of circus performers are followed by two stop-motion images of the man, now becoming recognizable as he approaches the camera. The alternation of images and music continues until the man is in medium closeup as he passes a poster on the wall revealing the title of the drama: ‘*Three Ring*

The first montage sequence from
Three Ring Circus.



Circus by Jack Gerson'. As the music builds to a climax the pace quickens: six images of circus performers appear onscreen in three seconds followed by cuts between the poster, framed at different angles, and the circus, with twelve stills in eight seconds, ending with a three-second image of the poster showing the play's title.

This title sequence lasts for fifty-three seconds. In that time there are forty-nine still images in a rapid montage which not only introduces the drama's circus theme and the central character but attempts to grab the attention of the audience through its stylistic audacity. MacTaggart's use of a montage of still images at the very outset of the drama may have been a modernist strategy, but the popular entertainment of the circus and enigma of the shadowy man were also designed to hook the television audience, who may have been watching the preceding programme of amateur boxing on the BBC and who might otherwise have been tempted to switch channels to the popular ITV drama *Knight Errant Limited* (Granada, 1960–61). The marked difference of *Three Ring Circus* from the other programmes showing on the evening of 2 February 1961 indicates the radical nature of its intervention in British television programming at the time. It was not only the rapid montage of still

26 These sound effects were provided by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop, based at the BBC's Maida Vale studios, which is why postproduction work on *Three Ring Circus* was completed in London, following the recording of the studio scenes in Glasgow.

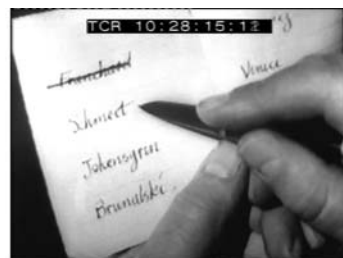
images that might have signalled this as something radically different, but also the alternation of raucous circus music and near silence, with just the ominous, echoing footsteps accompanying the images of the man.²⁶

The plot which unfolded after this unusual opening concerns the identity of the shadowy figure introduced in the title sequence. In the next two scenes we discover that the man (played by John Breslin) has lost his memory, and he spends the duration of the play trying to find out who he is. Reporting to a police station (the second studio scene after a brief one in which he meets two members of a travelling circus), he is given the name 'Paul' ('struck blind on the Damascus road') by Inspector Corbeau (Andrew Cruickshank) of the PCID (Peculiar Cases Investigation Department). Corbeau tells Paul that 'People are disappearing in their hundreds every day ... it's the political situation', and persuades him to take on the role of a missing politician, Louis Franchard, in exchange for providing Corbeau with political information. On arrival at the politician's family home (another studio set), an absurdist drama unfolds as Paul is welcomed back as 'Louis' by his 'wife', who remarks on seeing him: 'what strides plastic surgery has taken'. A fourteen-minute scene follows – recorded in one continuous take, except for a brief cutaway to the police station when Paul/Louis telephones Corbeau. The scene becomes increasingly absurd as the 'Prime Minister' (William Mervyn) arrives, waltzing around the room to music which accompanies his arrival and continues to play through most of the scene. The arrival of the husband's mistress, Sonia (Nora Laidlaw), precipitates a confrontation with his wife, causing an argument as the scene becomes increasingly chaotic, until Corbeau arrives with a replacement for Paul, another man who has turned up at the police station having lost his memory.

The dramatic music at the end of this studio scene continues as a new montage sequence begins, almost halfway through the drama. It begins with a medium closeup of Corbeau looking at his notebook, followed by images of him crossing off names as a worried Paul looks on. The sequence of still images that follows depicts, in a highly condensed, elliptical manner, events that might have occupied days or even weeks of story time. What MacTaggart delivers instead is an impressionistic sequence of seventy-five still images in a hundred seconds, a dazzling montage compressing narrative action into less than two minutes of screen time. Not only does this sequence condense the action in a modernist montage of images, rejecting the naturalist conventions of mainstream television drama, it also presents a nightmare scenario of expressionistic images conveying Paul's existential angst and bewilderment as Corbeau enlists him for a series of roles impersonating missing characters, the names of whom are progressively crossed off in the Inspector's notebook as Paul proves to be fundamentally ill-suited to the task.

The music from the previous scene gives a continuity to this montage of images, but it is impossible to register all of the detail in one viewing, most of the images appearing on screen for only a fraction of a second.

The second montage sequence
from *Three Ring Circus*.



Towards the end of the sequence, as the music builds to a climax, not only is there an increase in the number of closeups and extreme closeups but MacTaggart also introduces a layering of images with a ‘messianic’ long shot of Paul, arms raised and heavily backlit, casting a long shadow before him. This image has a prismatic ‘halo’ of images superimposed onto it: four images in each corner of the screen surrounding the central image. The smaller images seem to be of characters Paul has previously encountered, such as Mrs Franchard, or new characters he encounters in his subsequent roles, except for one obscure image which could be Mrs Franchard’s dog. As these superimposed images change, the character of Paul is shown once again in stop-motion, advancing towards the camera. As he gets closer, the concentric images of Mrs Franchard begin revolving around him until they become a blur, giving the impression of Paul being consumed in a kaleidoscopic whirlpool. The sequence ends on a big closeup of Paul’s mouth, caught in a frozen scream amidst the vortex of images.

Paul’s amnesia is clearly a metaphor for an existential dilemma about the loss of identity in modern society. Thematically, *Three Ring Circus* draws on the modernist themes of Expressionism, Existentialism and the

27 Kennedy Martin, 'Nats go home', p. 29.

28 The camera script for the second Langham Group production, *Mario*, suggests that here Pelissier did use a montage of still images, but the absence of a recording of the production makes it difficult to assess whether this may have influenced MacTaggart's montage sequences in *Three Ring Circus*.

29 'The Screenwriters Guild had a meeting, to which I wasn't invited, where they almost kind of lynched me because they felt that's what I was doing and it's absolutely true, I really did think that it was a director's medium. I've sort of modified my view about that now but that's what I was saying.' Troy Kennedy Martin in interview with the author, 27 March 1986. The subsequent shift towards filmed drama in the 1960s inevitably enhanced the position of the director in television drama: the careers of film directors such as Michael Apted, Alan Clarke, Stephen Frears, Jack Gold, Roland Joffe, Ken Loach, Mike Newell and Ken Russell all began in television in the 1960s.

Absurd. However, the drama is also *stylistically* modernist. This is most clearly evident in these two montage sequences, which represent a radical departure from the conventional aesthetics of television drama in the early 1960s, introducing a degree of modernist fragmentation designed 'to destroy the conventional bonds which tie the audience to the drama'.²⁷ While the Langham Group had also used montage as an alternative aesthetic, Pelissier's montage sequence in *The Torrents of Spring* comprised a series of live-action shots linked by dissolves (or, rather, mixes from one studio camera to another), which inevitably slowed the tempo of the montage.²⁸ Conversely, in *Three Ring Circus* MacTaggart used a very rapid montage of still images, shot on film, to advance the narrative in a highly elliptical, impressionistic manner, using superimposition and extreme closeups towards the end of the second sequence to convey Paul's existential nightmare as he despairs of ever finding his true identity.

After the tour de force of the central montage sequence, the drama continues for another thirty minutes in more conventional fashion – albeit with long takes and considerable camera mobility – as Paul tries out another role, that of the revolutionary, Leon Bartel. At first Paul believes he is finding 'his real self' in the role, but when his followers are massacred in a cascade of machine-gun fire, Paul rejects that role too. Back at the police station he tells Corbeau: 'We must break out of the circle . . . we must reinstate the individual against authorities, against all of them, against all the bastards'. He persuades Corbeau to release the prisoners at the police station and leaves to start a new life with the travelling circus, resigned to the fact that 'I'll never know who I am. It's not so unusual, very few people know who they really are.' As the drama ends, the Inspector decides to join him.

Three Ring Circus is a 'modernist' television drama both thematically and stylistically. While we might credit Gerson for the play's themes, it is MacTaggart's stylistic innovations which now seem more significant in terms of the development of a tradition of experimental drama at the BBC in the early 1960s. In this regard, in addition to providing a glimpse of a new televisual aesthetic, *Three Ring Circus* problematized the prevailing notion of authorship in television drama by elevating the role of the director to a position of importance equivalent to, if not greater than, that of the writer. In the light of this, it is significant that Kennedy Martin's subsequent call for a New Drama in 'Nats go home' emphasized the creative role of the director, leading to accusations from members of the Screenwriters Guild that he was making the case for television drama as a director's rather than a writer's medium.²⁹

If modernist drama on the stage was a writer's drama (Beckett, Genet, Ionesco, Pinter), in television drama the question of authorship is complicated by the production circumstances peculiar to the medium, especially in the 1960s during a period of significant technological change. *Three Ring Circus* is a text where a good case can be made for dual authorship, with both writer and director making significant

30 Indeed, it was John McGrath who delivered the first MacTaggart Lecture, in which he highlighted the importance of James MacTaggart to the development of a progressive, non-naturalistic television drama, a sentiment echoed by Troy Kennedy Martin in his MacTaggart Lecture at the 1986 Edinburgh International Television Festival. See Bob Franklin (ed.), *Television Policy: the MacTaggart Lectures* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 35–43, 105–12.

31 BBC Audience Research Report: 'Three-Ring Circus', 20 February 1961.

contributions to the play's achievement as a founding text of modernist television drama. However it was MacTaggart who subsequently emerged as a key figure in the BBC Drama Department in the early 1960s and whose significant contribution to British television was acknowledged by the establishment of the MacTaggart Memorial Lecture at the Edinburgh Festival in 1976.³⁰ Gerson, meanwhile, submitted a number of proposals to the BBC after *Three Ring Circus* but they were not well received and, apart from a single play about shipbuilding, *Splash OK* (BBC, 1968), and episodes for series such as *This Man Craig* (BBC, 1967–68), *Z Cars* (BBC, 1962–78), *The Regiment* (BBC, 1972–73) and *Sutherland's Law* (BBC, 1973–76), Gerson is probably best known for the ten-part supernatural thriller, *The Omega Factor* (BBC, 1979).

That *Three Ring Circus* was perceived as a challenging, unconventional drama by its contemporary audience is evidenced by the negative response it received from viewers, according to BBC Audience Research, achieving an 'outstandingly low' reaction index of twenty-eight (the average for plays from the Regions was sixty-seven). The BBC Audience Research Report records that:

the opinions of the great majority were outspokenly critical, and often indignantly phrased. These viewers could see no point in the 'stupid' plot of *Three-Ring Circus*, felt that the whole atmosphere of the play was so baffling and vague as to pass equally well for that of farce, fantasy or 'the world of childish dreams', and found the characters and their actions meaningless 'beyond belief'. Several viewers in particular intimated that the play had struck them as regrettably weird and pretentious in style, with no discoverable objective beyond that of reducing its audience to a state of bewilderment and frustration.³¹

Clearly, *Three Ring Circus* was viewed as an obscure, avant-garde drama by many of the viewers who tuned in on 2 February 1961. Nearly fifty years later, however, its significance as the 'ur-drama' in a tradition leading to *The Wednesday Play* and beyond is finally becoming apparent.

I am grateful to Kathleen Dickson at the BFI's National Film and Television Archive for her help in obtaining a VHS viewing copy of *Three Ring Circus* and to the BFI's Fleur Buckley for arranging for me to borrow the tape for my presentation at the *Screen Studies Conference 2006*. Thanks also to Trish Hayes at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham, and to Robin Nelson for his comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Almodóvar's unpublished short stories and the question of queer auteurism

PAUL JULIAN SMITH

There seems little doubt that Pedro Almodóvar is now amongst the most commercially and critically successful of European directors. In a career spanning three decades and seventeen features, from *Pepi, Luci, Bom* in 1980 to *Los abrazos rotos/Broken Embraces* in 2009, all of his films have made a profit and many have won the most prestigious of prizes, including Oscars for both Best Foreign Language Film (*Todo sobre mi madre/All About My Mother* [1999]) and (more importantly, perhaps) Best Script (*Hable con ella/Talk to Her* [2002]). He is in the unique position of being celebrated by the Hollywood establishment even as he holds tight to his native Spanish language and locations in Madrid and la Mancha. Marvin D'Lugo has recently read Almodóvar's oeuvre as a consistent and coherent reflection on his own career: 'through the evolution of a style and a conception of filmmaking, he has moved to a critique of his own past and the culture out of which his cinema has taken shape'.¹

Abroad, this success story has been closely linked to homosexuality. In English-speaking countries Almodóvar is as regularly attributed the label of 'openly gay director' as he is the backhanded compliment of 'women's director'. Ironically this has not been the case in Spain, where Almodóvar's features, massively popular at the box office, have been frequently patronized by critics and snubbed at the Spanish Oscars or 'Goyas'.² And while other Spanish celebrities have openly negotiated recent shifts in the boundary between public and private (by willingly coming out or even celebrating the same-sex marriage that is relatively

¹ *Pedro Almodóvar* (Urbana and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 129.

² See Núria Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2003), pp. 146–7.

- 3 For a rare account of Almodóvar within the context of a gay aesthetics and a gay audience in Spain, see Alberto Mira, *Miradas insuñidas: gays y lesbianas en el cine* (Barcelona and Madrid: Egales, 2008), pp. 43–5, 435–8.
- 4 See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Almodóvar> and <http://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedro_Almodóvar> [both accessed 20 October 2008].
- 5 See Triana-Toribio, *Spanish National Cinema*, pp. 132–40.
- 6 See, for example, Stephen Maddison, 'All about women: Pedro Almodóvar and the heterosocial dynamic', *Textual Practice*, vol. 14, no. 2 (2000), pp. 265–84.
- 7 In his review of *Todo sobre mi madre*/*All About My Mother*, Carlos Boyero (now the most influential press reviewer in Spain) wrote that he could not recognize himself in Almodóvar's world, which he claimed was populated exclusively by lesbians, junkies and transvestites. '¡Cuánto talento para la ortodoxia abusiva!', *El Mundo*, 16 April 1999 [press clipping from FilMOTECA Madrid, without page no.].
- 8 Paul Julian Smith, *Desire Unlimited: the Cinema of Pedro Almodóvar* (London and New York, NY: Verso, 2000), p. 80.
- 9 'Man of La Mania', *Film Comment*, vol. 24, no. 6 (November/December 1989), pp. 13–17, p. 15.
- 10 Thus Stephen Holden identifies the main character in his *New York Times* review as 'a predatory pre-operative transsexual ... once a beautiful boy soprano', <http://movies.nytimes.com/2004/10/09/movies/09bad.html?_r=1&oref=slogin>, while Angel Fernández Santos of *El País* writes more vaguely of the film's 'iceberg-images' and 'poetic territory of enigma'. <http://www.elpais.com/articulo/cine/perversidad/angel/elpepuculcin/20040319elpepicin_11/Tes> [both accessed 20 October 2008].
- 11 Paul Julian Smith, 'Resurrecting the art movie? Almodóvar's blue period', in *Contemporary Spanish Culture: TV, Fashion, Art and Film*

uncontroversial in Spain), Almodóvar remains silent on his private life, even as his political position, once ambiguous, has become overtly identified with that same governing Socialist party that extended marriage rights at the start of its first term.³ It is symptomatic that the English-language Wikipedia article on Almodóvar confidently lends him both the 'openly gay' and the 'women's director' labels, while the Spanish-language equivalent fails to mention either.⁴

Almodóvar has also received relatively limited academic attention in Spain itself, where it is no secret that most scholars of Spanish film are unsympathetic to his highly coloured narrative and mise-en-scene, preferring the rigours of social realism, a genre they identify with a distinctively Spanish tradition and aesthetic.⁵ Conversely, Almodóvar's favoured subjects (women and gays) fortuitously coincide with an Anglo-American academy in which film studies has historically been preoccupied with feminism and queer theory.⁶ The anglophone cultural field has, critically if not commercially, thus proved a more fertile ground for Almodóvar than his home territory as he has, through the sheer force of his artistic vision, produced a new image of Spain that is recognized more widely overseas than it is in the Peninsula.⁷

It has been argued elsewhere that, far from being repressed, there was an active desire for homosexuality in Almodóvar's cinema that facilitated its distribution abroad, as early as *La ley del deseo*/*The Law of Desire* (1988).⁸ Certainly there has existed a group of gay critics who explained, celebrated and thus promoted, inadvertently or otherwise, his films to foreign audiences. This queer-friendly tendency runs from Almodóvar's earliest US interview, in which he showed a snapshot of his boyfriend to pioneer queer film historian Vito Russo,⁹ to the much warmer and more open reception that the queer content of 2004's *La mala educación*/*Bad Education* received in New York and London than in Madrid or Barcelona.¹⁰

The success of Almodóvar's most recent films (since 1995's *La flor de mi secreto*/*The Flower of My Secret*), whose quality has been attested by a general critical consensus, is due in part to his resurrection of that highly contested category the 'art movie'. The three privileged themes of the later films have been: literarity (the self-conscious references to Djuna Barnes, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote); urbanism (the celebration of architectural monuments previously unseen in his cinema such as Madrid's Plaza Mayor or Barcelona's Sagrada Familia); and sexuality (the lesbians and trannies of *All About My Mother*; the paedophile priests and perverse youths of *Bad Education*).¹¹ Once again, such adult themes may well have been positively welcomed as signs of distinction by Almodóvar's emerging audience: newly upmarket at home, where rising ticket prices made moviegoers more wealthy, urban, and educated than ever before, and a self-selecting niche abroad, as foreign-language films found distribution increasingly difficult.¹²

The question remains as to how, or indeed if, Almodóvar can be considered a queer auteur. Auteurship has of course been discussed and

(Oxford and Cambridge: Polity, 2003), pp. 144–68, pp. 155–66.

- 12 According to research carried out by the Spanish organization representing authors and publishers, in the late 1990s the cinema audience in Spain became increasingly dominated by the urban and highly educated upper and upper middle classes. See Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, *Hábitos de consumo cultural* (Madrid: SGAE, 2000), p. 78.

- 13 Pam Cook, *The Cinema Book*, 2nd ed. (London: British Film Institute, 1991), p. 304.

- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 314.

- 15 Núria Triana-Toribio refers briefly to Almodóvar in her excellent study of two other ‘media-friendly’ filmmakers, ‘Auteurism and commerce in contemporary Spanish cinema: *directores mediáticos*’, *Screen*, vol. 49, no. 3 (2008), pp. 259–76 (pp. 262–3). In her study of current Latin American directors, dependent on foreign sources for finance and distribution, Catherine Grant goes so far as to use the term ‘the commerce of auteurism’, in ‘www.auteur.com?’, *Screen*, vol. 41, no. 1 (2000), pp. 101–8, pp. 105–6.

- 16 For a recent example of one director’s ironic self-awareness of mediatized auteurship, see Allison Hope Weiner’s interview ‘Shyamalan’s Hollywood horror story, with twist’. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/02/business/media/02night.html>> [accessed 20 October 2008].

- 17 Michel Foucault, ‘What is an author?’, in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 101–20, pp. 108–12.

critiqued even more than the related category of ‘art cinema’, and this is not the place to summarize forty years of debate. But a brief citation from Pam Cook’s *The Cinema Book* sets the scene for much current usage of the term:

There is now a certain tendency to examine how particular sites and practices produce the author, a concentration on how films circulate, the contexts in which they are apprehended and the rules which govern their interpretation. This approach contends that authorship is produced through such cultural apparatuses and technologies as: interview, criticism, publicity, and curriculum, and that . . . one should try to take account of the different conditions of possibility for creative claims.¹³

Although Cook insists that the ‘independence’ of auteurs and their ‘vision’ are inextricable from industrial factors,¹⁴ her institutional understanding of auteurism (as sites and practices, contexts and rules, apparatuses and technologies) is, of course, far from the romantic conception of creative genius that might once have been associated with the term.

Clearly each of these factors is relevant to Almodóvar’s unique cultural career, although the most apposite would seem to be the textual: the skill of his production company El Deseo in orchestrating interview, criticism, publicity and curriculum has been a necessary, if hardly sufficient, motive for his success, and sets him apart from European rivals.¹⁵ The conditions of possibility Cook cites include nationality (‘changed global circumstances of film production, circulation and exhibition’), gender (women remain in a tiny minority as directors), and cinephilia (the proliferation of festivals may well influence artistic agendas). But we would have to add homosexuality as a further, and perhaps ambivalent, condition of possibility for Almodóvar’s creative claims. As in the case of women directors, rarely admitted to the select ranks of auteurdom, there seems to be a structural conflict between sexual preference and the perceived effortless authority of authorship. And it could be argued that one-time masters such as Passolini and Fassbinder achieved their status despite, rather than because of, their sexuality.

There is no doubt that even today a director’s name above the title remains part of the film industry’s repertoire of promotional strategies.¹⁶ Rather than wholly dissolving auteurism, in postmodern fashion, into such commercial questions, however, I would like to argue for a broader approach that combines the institutional and the aesthetic. As is well known, Foucault’s functionalist ‘author function’ identified three necessary conditions for a candidate to fulfil in order to qualify for privileged status: consistency of value (all works in the corpus must be equally worthy of serious consideration); conceptual coherence (however varied, the works must share a common theme); and stylistic unity (their artistic signature must be unmistakable).¹⁷ It could be

18 For the equation of the artistic 'signature' and fashion 'label', see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art* (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity, 1996), p. 171.

19 Smith, *Desire Unlimited*; Mark Allinson, *A Spanish Labyrinth: the Films of Pedro Almodóvar* (London and New York, NY: IB Tauris, 2001); Gwynne Edwards, *Almodóvar: Labyrinths of Passion* (London: Peter Owen, 2001); David Johnston, *Pedro Almodóvar* (Bath: Absolute Press, 2001); D'Lugo, *Pedro Almodóvar*; Ernesto Acevedo Muñoz, *Pedro Almodóvar* (London: British Film Institute, 2007).

20 See, for example, Kathleen M. Vernon and Barbara Morris, *Post-Franco, Postmodern: the Films of Pedro Almodóvar* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995).

21 See, for example, Paula Willoquet-Maricondi (ed.), *Pedro Almodóvar: Interviews* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2004).

22 To my knowledge the only reference to these unpublished stories is in Smith, *Desire Unlimited*, pp. 1–2.

claimed that the Almodóvar 'signature' is akin to that of a fashion label, whose designer name (for Bourdieu) magically adds 'distinction' to a previously anonymous cultural commodity.¹⁸ But I would like, for a moment at least, to take seriously the possibility that the somewhat archaic virtues of consistency, coherence and stylistic unity can still have critical purchase in the investigation of an oeuvre; and may indeed be significantly inflected by their placing within a queer context. And I intend to test this hypothesis by examining works by Almodóvar that have received no previous attention.

Almodóvar's sixteen features have been exhaustively studied. Indeed there are no fewer than seven critical monographs on his work in English alone, of which the first was published in 1994.¹⁹ There are also a large number of volumes of collected essays²⁰ and interviews²¹ in many languages. But there remains a body of his early work that is wholly unknown and has received no scholarly (or indeed journalistic) attention: the short stories written in the 1970s that are held in fading, cyclostyled volumes in the manuscript room of Madrid's Biblioteca Nacional.²² I would like to give an account of one of these unpublished collections, 'Relatos' (shelf mark T49), attributed to 'Pedro Almodóvar Caballero' (a unique instance in which he uses his full name) and dated 19 July 1975, just four months before the death of the dictator Francisco Franco. As Almodóvar's earliest surviving work (his first feature would not be distributed theatrically until 1980; only one of his early super-8 shorts has been released on DVD), these narratives at the very least deserve proper scholarly attention and at best may give unique insight into their author's artistic development. The fact that one of those stories was further developed into an unproduced script that also survives in typescript makes it especially significant in examining Almodóvar's earliest modes of composition.

Six copies were made of the typescript 'Relatos'. It consists of eight stories of greatly varying length: the shortest is two folios, the longest nineteen. I shall give a brief account of each in the order in which they appear in the volume. In 'La vida por delante' ('The life ahead of you'; five folios), which takes place in Almodóvar's native La Mancha, a young, romantic poet is killed in a traffic accident; his pragmatic girlfriend cheerfully escapes in the car with a stranger. The brief and sketchy 'La gorda Carmela' ('Fat Carmela'; two folios) chronicles an obese woman's comic attempts at suicide, also in the countryside. In the lengthy and detailed 'Retrato superficial de la vida de Miguel' ('Superficial portrait of Miguel's life'; twelve folios) we are told the life story of a man but with time running backwards, starting with his emergence from the grave as a decrepit old man and ending with his final retreat into his mother's womb as a baby. The longest text (nineteen folios), which I treat at the end of this paper, has the clearest connections with Almodóvar's future cinema. 'La visita' ('The visit') tells the story of a beautiful drag queen who returns to her childhood seminary to confront the priest who had abused her as a young boy. 'La anunciación'

(‘The annunciation’; two folios) is a sketch of a Virgin Mary who is updated as a housewife and receives the angel’s visit while doing her laundry. ‘La redención’ (‘Redemption’; fourteen folios) is a serious retelling of the story of Christ’s Passion, which focuses on His relation with the thief Barabbas and ends with the two fleeing into the countryside before the Crucifixion has taken place. The briefest text, ‘Las muletas olvidadas’ (‘Forgotten crutches’; one folio), shows the downside to a miracle cure: now the lame man can walk, the poor crutches are abandoned. Finally, ‘La anciana’ (‘The elderly lady’; four folios) is the story of an unlikely job opportunity and was rewritten as a short script. I return to this narrative in both its versions a little later.

There are some general points to be made here about these texts, which show evidence of four continuing and overlapping tensions. First, between the country and the city: although several stories treat the tedium of life in La Mancha, and ‘La visita’ takes place in rural Extremadura, the promise of an urban lifestyle is available even to the elderly lady in ‘La anciana’. Second, the comic and the serious are crudely juxtaposed: ‘La gorda Carmela’ is based on farcical physical comedy that would be well received in the playground, while the existential angst of ‘Retrato superficial’ is worthy of Becket. Third come the secular and the religious. The replaying of Biblical narrative is surprisingly frequent here, in the young Almodóvar’s versions of the Annunciation and the Passion (and perhaps of Christ’s miraculous cures). The tone of these pieces echoes a contemporary work, the unexpectedly sober *Salomé* (1978), Almodóvar’s only Super-8 to be released on DVD. *Salomé* somehow manages to combine an unsalacious version of the titular story with a restaging of the sacrifice of Isaac. Finally, there is the question of narrative development and perspective. The most striking thing about ‘Relato superficial’ is of course its backward-running plot, a technique that the young Pedro would share with established creators as diverse as Stephen Sondheim (in the 1989 musical *Merrily We Roll Along*), Harold Pinter (in his 1978 play *Betrayal*), and Martin Amis (in his 1991 novel *Time’s Arrow*). The distinctive feature of ‘La redención’ is that the perspective on the familiar Christ tale is the unfamiliar one of the thief who, in the Gospel at least, would be crucified beside Him.

I would suggest, then, that these juvenilia reveal, in traditional auteurist style, privileged themes that emerge fully fledged only in Almodóvar’s latest and most sophisticated features. Thus having begun as a cinematic booster of Madrid, Almodóvar has latterly returned to his rural roots with some sensitivity, especially in *Volver* (2006). Having made his name with outrageous farces, he has increasingly acknowledged the tragic subtext of his features: *Talk to Her* ends in suicide, *Bad Education* in trauma and murder; no less than three recent films focus on the distressing condition of youthful coma or brain death.²³ The religious realm, disavowed in Almodóvar’s early films of the *movida* (the cultural revolution of early 1980s Madrid), returns with a vengeance in *Bad Education*, which glories in the riches of Catholic

23 Marsha Kinder, ‘Reinventing the motherland: Almodóvar’s brain-dead trilogy’, *Film Quarterly*, vol. 58, no. 2 (2004), pp. 9–25.

iconography even as it attacks the hypocrisies of the Church. Likewise the washing of the inert body of the coma victim in *Talk to Her* clearly cites the deposition of Christ, a reference made explicit by the musical cue used in the sequence, which is entitled 'The Holy Sheet'. Finally, the formal concern for narrative structure and point of view has been fully exploited in the latest films. *Talk to Her* is told in a series of flashbacks within flashbacks; *Bad Education*'s tale of priestly abuse is told in a film within a film and from at least two conflicting points of view.

Having made a general argument for the importance of these unknown early and imperfect texts as plausible evidence for Almodóvar's auteur status (of the consistency, coherence and unity of his work), we can go on to examine more closely the two stories that announce the queer current by which Almodóvar will be well known, abroad at least: 'La anciana' (the story that was rewritten as an early script) and 'La visita' (the story that was incorporated into both *The Law of Desire* of 1987 and *Bad Education* of 2004).

In the first story the opening situation of the unnamed protagonist is described as follows:

Sentada en la cama, la anciana señora hojea con curiosidad el periódico. En la página de ofertas laborales hay algo que puede interesarla: SE NECESITAN SECRETARIAS DE 18 A 30 AÑOS – BUENA PRESENCIA – QUE TENGAN CONOCIMIENTOS DEL INGLÉS O FRANCÉS. SUELDOS A CONVENIR – PRESENTARSE EN . . .

-Esto puede ser lo que me conviene, piensa para sí, sonriendo pícaramente. Con el periódico entre las manos imagina, semidormida, lo que con toda seguridad se esconde bajo aquel anuncio. (fol. 1)

Sitting on her bed the elderly lady curiously flicks through the newspaper. On the jobs vacant she finds something of interest: WANTED: SECRETARIES AGE 18-30 – GOOD APPEARANCE – KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH OR FRENCH. SALARY TO BE AGREED – PLEASE COME TO . . .

'This could be just what I need', she thinks to herself, smiling naughtily. Still holding the newspaper and half asleep she imagines what is surely hidden behind that advertisement.

Note that there is no description of the location or contextual placing of the character here. Almodóvar moves straight on to her bizarre and touching fantasy: namely that this innocent advert is a cover for prostitution and the white slave trade in Beirut.

When the old lady goes for interview her attitude is described as 'suficiente y serena' ('self-controlled and calm'), but she is rudely dismissed by the employer: 'Largo de aquí, vieja loca [esto no es] un asilo' ('Get out of here, you crazy old woman. This isn't an old people's home'; fol. 3). Almodóvar's conclusion is significant:

Se siente desorientada, no quiere volver a su casa, donde la esperan sus criados, su viejo esposo enfermo, y la comodidad de una situación social privilegiada. Porque lo que ella desea es vivir, abandonar aquella rutina . . . decide volver a su casa pero sabe que en la primera ocasión lo dejará todo para siempre.

-No es el único empleo interesante, ya encontraré otras cosas, la ciudad está llena de ocasiones . . . FIN

She feels disorientated and doesn't want to go home, where she is awaited by her servants, her old sick husband, and the comforts of a socially privileged position. Because what she wants is to live, to abandon routine . . . she decides to go back home but she knows that the first chance she has she'll leave it all for ever.

'This isn't the only interesting job, I'll find something else, the city is full of opportunities . . .' END

This character is clearly the prototype for a recurrent figure in Almodóvar's features: the mature woman who seems to serve as a projection of gay male fantasies of escape from a repressive social order. We think of Luci in *Pepi, Luci, Bom*, the browbeaten housewife who leaves an abusive husband for masochistic ecstasy with teenage punkette Bom; the Mother Superior in *Entre tinieblas/Dark Habits* (1983), engaged in a passionate romance with an unsuitable nightclub chanteuse; or even Carmen Maura's moving mother in *Volver*, who kills her husband, abusive once more, and impersonates a ghost for her estranged daughters.

Almodóvar's sympathy for and empathy with such mature female characters are distinctive and transparent; but it is interesting to see how he develops this vestigial tale into a short script that remained unfilmed. 'El anuncio (título provisional)' (shelf mark T50247) is dated 14 June 1976 (that is, one year after the collection of stories) and is divided into fourteen scenes. The first gives an elaborated and much more visualized account of the setting of the lady who is only now granted a name:

Habitación de Doña Julia y su esposo. Hay dos camas separadas por una mesita. Doña Julia está en la cama más cercana a la ventana, recostada en su almohadón. Son las diez de la mañana, la luz propia de esta hora entra modosamente por la ventana. El matrimonio anda por los setenta años pero, por lo que puede verse, el tiempo ha tratado peor al marido que al la esposa. La habitación consta de rancios muebles, llenos de detalles familiares, religiosos, y 'deliciosamente femeninos'. La atmósfera de la casa es de una familia burguesa acomodada. Después de mirar varias páginas, la venerable señora encuentra algo que parece llamarle la atención. En la página de ofertas laborales hay un anuncio sobre el que la señora reposa pensativa la mirada . . . Doña Julia se quita las gafas y sonríe para sí como diciéndose, ya sé lo que se esconde detrás del anuncio. Dobla el periódico y semidormida deja vagar su imaginación (fol. 1)

The bedroom of Doña Julia and her husband. There are two beds separated by a table. Doña Julia is on the bed closer to the window, leaning up against her bolster. It's ten a.m. and the light appropriate to this time of day is smoothly coming through the window. The couple are about seventy but, as can be clearly seen, time has been less kind with the husband than it has with the wife. The bedroom is full of old-style furniture featuring details which are familiar, religious, and 'deliciously feminine'. The atmosphere is that of a comfortably off middle-class family. After looking at a number of pages, the elderly lady finds something that seems to interest her. On the jobs vacant page there's an ad which the lady looks at pensively . . . Doña Julia takes off her glasses and smiles to herself, as if saying, 'I have a pretty good idea what's hidden behind this advertisement'. She folds the paper up and half-asleep lets her imagination wander.

Here, unlike in the first version, precise details of *mise-en-scene* serve the purpose of not just class location (bourgeois comfort) but also of psychological explanation (the twin beds hinting at marital frustration, the 'deliciously feminine' details of an outdated style now available to be reappropriated as camp).

At once more concretely objective and more emotionally subjective than the first version, this opening scene gives way to a detailed evocation of the old lady's fantasy: abducted from the interview room to a hotel in Morocco (fol. 6), soon Doña Julia is wowing the nightclub crowd as an unlikely diva: 'vestida explosivamente, sale a cantar Hava naguila' ('explosively dressed, she comes on stage singing Hava Nagila'; fol. 7). A montage, the sequence most beloved of Hollywood biopic, shows Julia enjoying a diet of drugs, beatings and triumphant musical performances that turn her into the 'reina de aquel antro' ('queen of that dive'; fol. 9). She is rewarded with the passionate kisses of 'un apuesto joven' ('a strapping young man'; fol.10).

Awaking from her dream (minutely visualized by Almodóvar) Julia takes a taxi to the office, where she is, as before, rejected by the interviewer (fol. 11). Although she is close to tears, Julia composes a letter to her husband before leaving home: 'Quiero llevar una vida independiente . . . espero que podamos seguir siendo buenos amigos' ('I want to lead an independent life . . . I hope we can still be friends'; fol. 13). The script ends as follows: 'Se baja del taxi en la puerta de un hotel. Una nueva vida empieza para Doña Julia. FIN' ('She gets out of the taxi outside a hotel. A new life begins for Doña Julia. END'; fol. 15).

What is fascinating here is to see how a premiss that is rather unpromising from the cinematic point of view (tracing as it does a transformation that is internal and invisible) is now opened out by Almodóvar in strictly filmic terms through the newly precise *mise-en-scene* (the 'deliciously feminine' furniture), the explicit staging of fantasy (the Morocco sequences), the appeal to editing (classic montage), and the use of exterior locations (the taxi and hotel). It is

telling that where before we were merely told that our heroine would at some point abandon the marital home, here we are actually shown her arriving at the hotel entrance, the gateway to a new life of urban opportunities. The sympathetic empathy of a twenty-something gay man for a seventy-year-old married lady is here combined with elements that now clearly belong to transnational camp: the divaesque performances and costumes that hark back to an era far indeed from the self-conscious modernity of contemporary Madrid. But this camp comedy is by no means cruel. As Almodóvar's subsequent career was to show, a genuine love for and admiration of heroines of a certain age will be a consistent feature of his signature style.

Let us end by examining 'La visita', but beginning with the mature film versions of the narrative. In *The Law of Desire* (Almodóvar's first self-production which lent its name to his production company, El Deseo), Carmen Maura's transsexual Tina returns to her old school chapel with her lesbian lover's daughter. With a tousled mane of hair, hoop earrings and flamboyant red polka-dot dress, she is a vibrant parody of Spanish femininity. Advancing towards the camera which tracks back before her, she sings, straight to it, a hymn of praise to the Virgin, until the priest playing the organ comes into shot. As their dialogue begins the couple are held in two-shot with the child playing behind. Almodóvar finally cuts into closeup for more conventional shot/reverse-shot, as Tina reveals that she is that boy whom the over-affectionate priest has tried in vain to forget.

There is some humour here (the priest asks Tina not to return to the chapel choir) and there is no evidence of real abuse. In Maura's subtle performance Tina is more melancholy than angry and, indeed, fiercely protective of the memories that are 'all [she] possesses'. Moreover she proclaims that she has not changed much since she was a boy, immune to the disappointment provoked by the men she loved, whether priests or fathers.

The revision of this scene in *Bad Education* is much more complex and sober. After drag queen Gael García Bernal's Zahara confronts Father Manolo in the chapel she pursues him to his office, where he is nostalgically studying a snapshot of the child Ignacio that he abused. García Bernal's flowing locks seem to echo Maura's from twenty years earlier and his performance is equally nuanced. Like Maura he advances towards the camera to confront the priest and their closeups are nearly frontal in position. A flashback within a flashback (or a script within a script) heralds for the first time, however, a playing out of the primal scene of abuse itself. As the innocent child sings 'Moon River' (from *Breakfast at Tiffany's* [Blake Edwards, 1961], the film Almodóvar so often cites as a camp classic), we cut to a slow-motion sequence of boys bathing in emerald water, a pastoral idyll whose brilliant light contrasts tellingly with the gloomy interior of the previous location. The point of view here is troublingly non-specific, but is best taken as the 'mindscreen' of the priest. Cutting back to the mismatched couple,

Almodóvar chooses to hide the sexual act behind a clump of reeds. The fleeing child falls, cuts his forehead, and, in a showy digital effect, his face literally splits in two, the unambiguous sign of lasting psychic trauma.

Unlike the earlier version there is no trace of comedy here. Ignacio–Zahara is also strangely unsympathetic, blackmailing the priest whereas Tina simply sought to relive her memories of past pleasures. And while Tina holds fast to that lost love, however disappointing, Ignacio–Zahara has rather been wounded by it, blaming her tragic destiny on the unwanted sexual aggression. That attitude will, moreover, become increasingly complex when later in the film we discover that García Bernal's character is merely impersonating the abused child, who was in fact the junkie brother he will conspire to murder with another over-amorous priest. The play of reverse narrative movement and shifting perspective is one that we have glimpsed already in Almodóvar's early 'Relatos'.

How then do the mature movie versions of this compulsively repeated scene compare to their origin in the short story of 1975? Here there is a conspicuous defence of frivolity. The transvestite returns to the seminary to announce the death of her brother (as in *Bad Education*) but is dressed as Dietrich in *The Devil is a Woman* (fol. 1). Later it is the priest who dons glitzy drag, wearing a 'red velvet gown' in the style of the 1950s (fol. 10) and kissing a *chulo* (a cute, cocky guy) at a party (fol. 16). Typically, however, this camp comedy is already cut with unexpected seriousness. The sexual abuse is explicit: in a flashback the child is forced to masturbate the priest, whose pubic hair is said to feel 'like dry grass in a field' (fol. 9), a disturbingly specific tactile reference. And Almodóvar provides us with two mutually contradictory endings: either the transvestite swishes out safely (like Tina in *The Law of Desire*) or (like Zahara in *Bad Education*) she is murdered by the priest who only then discovers she is the much mourned brother (fol. 19). Almodóvar's ambivalence towards the scene, which permits no definitive ending, could hardly be more self-evident.

This constant cohabitation of comedy and tragedy is clearly one of Almodóvar's trademarks, even as his features became increasingly serious over the decades. And it is clear that this tendency, linked to his equally ambivalent feelings for his rural origins and Catholic education, form part of that formal continuity and thematic unity that would seem to qualify him as an old-fashioned auteur, even as he has exploited the commercially-compromised resources of promotion and interview that is the sign of branding in contemporary cinema.

I have argued that the two figures first found in the unpublished and rapidly fading typescripts of 'El anuncio' and 'La visita' (the mature, fantasizing woman and the glamorous, vengeful transvestite) can be read as structuring principles of Almodóvar's now extensive film corpus. But Almodóvar could hardly have anticipated that such idiosyncratic queer subject matter would provide the foundation for such a successful career.

24 See Suzie Mackenzie's 'All about my father', a crude attempt to psychoanalyze Almodóvar based on his alleged childhood experiences, first published in *The Guardian* in 2002, reprinted in Willoquet-Maricondi (ed.), *Pedro Almodóvar*, pp. 154–61.

And, in spite of the compulsive repetition of some themes in his oeuvre (which, as we have seen, stretches over some thirty years) I am not suggesting that his extravagantly imaginative creations be reduced to mere symptoms of psychobiography. After all, many thousands of real victims of priestly sexual abuse have not succeeded in turning that trauma into artistic expression. More important perhaps is the evidence given by these unknown texts of Almodóvar's continuing exploration of fictional form: of narrative development and multiple points of view. If the child is indeed father to the man (as some of the more intrusive press interviews of Pedro have suggested),²⁴ then the earliest creative works that survive by that man confirm that he is clearly a self-conscious artist as much as he is a successful self-publicist and reluctant queer auteur.

My thanks to Francisco A. Zuríán.

Andrew Britton, *Britton on Film: the Complete Film Criticism of Andrew Britton*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Contemporary Approaches to Film and Television Series). Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2009, 533 pp.

JAMES ZBOROWSKI

Robin Wood's *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film* is 'dedicated to the memory of Andrew Britton'.¹ In that dedication, Wood asserts that Britton's 'miscellaneous writings, critical and theoretical, scattered among various and often obscure periodicals, would, collected, amount to a book of incomparable distinction that would be indispensable to any university film course'.²

Britton on Film, which contains twenty-eight articles (divided into four sections: 'Hollywood Cinema', 'Hollywood Movies', 'European Cinema' and 'Film and Cultural Theory') written across the space of nineteen years (1976–94), is a large and wide-ranging anthology, but it is possible to identify a set of recurrent topics and concerns.

Britton, like Wood, combines an explicitly radical critical position with a defence, mounted with equal passion, of the value of bourgeois art forms. In his criticism, the films of the classical Hollywood cinema are treated as 'exemplary bourgeois works' (p. 440) with a vital connection to surrounding and preceding cultural forms. In a passage that recalls Bazin's famous celebration of the genius of the system,³ Britton argues that

the greatness of the popular American cinema has always been inseparable from the quite extraordinary ideological productivity of its conventions, the contradictory diversity of the cultural traditions which fed into them, and the existence of material conditions of production which were hugely congenial to the realization of their significance. The nineteenth-century realist novel, the popular theatrical melodrama, American Gothic, psychoanalysis, montage theory, German modernism – the classical Hollywood cinema had its enabling resources. (p. 153)

As parts of extended critical accounts of individual films, Britton explores the relationship of *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vicente Minnelli, 1944) to the pastoral and 'what one might call the "alternative small-town tradition"' (p. 160) (exemplified by Herman Melville's *Pierre: or The Ambiguities* [1852] and Mark Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson* [1894], among other texts); of *Now, Voyager* (Irving Rapper, 1942) to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and the American Gothic; and of *Mandingo* (Richard Fleischer, 1975) to the American Gothic and Jacobean tragedy, to name just three examples.

Britton vigorously attacks theoretical positions that dismiss the culture of the past entirely and indiscriminately. In 'The myth of postmodernism: the bourgeois intelligentsia in the age of Reagan', he displays withering contempt for a writer who, 'taking his cue from Jean-François Lyotard,

1 Robin Wood, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. v.

2 Ibid.

3 André Bazin, 'La politique des auteurs' (1957), trans. Peter Graham, in Peter Graham (ed.), *The New Wave* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), pp. 137–55.

needs no more than two sentences to dispose of four or five centuries of political struggle and intellectual labor' (p. 461) and for 'the contemporary bourgeoisie's loathsome philistine indifference to its own cultural past' (p. 480). He is particularly hostile to theoretical and critical accounts that he perceives to be antimaterialist despite their contrary self-identification. This informs his discussions of Theodor Adorno in 'Consuming culture: the development of a theoretical orthodoxy'; of 'The ideology of *Screen*'; and of Rosalind Coward and John Ellis's *Language and Materialism*⁴ and Colin McCabe's 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses'⁵ in the introduction to his critical account of *Madame de...* (Max Ophuls, 1953). In the latter article, Britton challenges McCabe's model of the 'classic realist text' – which proposes that the narrative prose of realist fiction 'den[ies] its own status as writing'⁶ and 'is not regarded as material; it is dematerialised to achieve perfect representation'⁷ – using close analysis of the same passage from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1874) cited by McCabe in support of his thesis. By referring in that passage 'not [to] an experience, but the narrative of an experience', Britton argues, 'Eliot emphatically alerts us to the dialectic proper to mimesis. . . . The foregrounding of narration has the effect of compelling us to reconsider our reading, and perhaps to criticize it' (p. 318). The crux of Britton's argument is summarized in another of his articles, 'Blissing out: the politics of Reaganite entertainment' (demonstrating that, along with a defence of bourgeois art forms in general, a defence of mimesis in particular animates much of Britton's work):

In the great narratives, there is no contradiction between the text's being about the text and the act of reading, and the text's transforming the ways in which we are able to conceive of a social reality external to it, which is why it has proved so easy in recent years to discover so many 'classical' texts with 'modernist' tendencies. (p. 104)

An attack upon ideological formalism also forms part of 'The philosophy of the pigeonhole: Wisconsin formalism and "the classical style"', Britton's critique of Bordwell, Staiger and Thompson's *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*.⁸ In the first part of that book, Bordwell suggests that 'character-centred – that is, personal or psychological – causality is the armature of the classical story',⁹ and that 'it is easy to see in the goal-oriented protagonist a reflection of an ideology of American individualism and enterprise, but it is the peculiar accomplishment of the classical cinema to translate this ideology into a rigorous chain of cause of effect'.¹⁰ Britton responds:

a 'goal-oriented protagonist,' and the sequential dramatization of such a protagonist's pursuit of these goals do not in themselves 'reflect', let alone (as Bordwell implies) affirm, any ideology whatsoever. The goals of the protagonists of *Moby Dick* (1956) [sic], or of the films *Scarface* (1932), *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Now, Voyager* (1942),

4 Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977).

5 Colin McCabe, 'Realism and the cinema: notes on some Brechtian theses', *Screen*, vol. 15, no. 2 (1974), pp. 7–27.

6 Ibid., p. 9.

7 Ibid., p. 8.

8 David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985).

9 Ibid., p. 13.

10 Ibid., p. 16.

- 11 Brad Stevens, 'Britton on film', *Sight and Sound*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2009), p. 93.
- 12 The missing article is 'The reckless moment', *Framework*, no. 4 (1976), pp. 17–20.
- 13 Andrew Britton, 'Pursued: a reply to Paul Willemen', *Framework*, no. 4 (1976), pp. 4–15.
- 14 Ian Cameron and Douglas Pye (eds), *The Movie Book of the Western* (London: Studio Vista, 1996).
- 15 Paul Willemen, 'Notes towards the construction of readings of Jacques Tourneur', in Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen (eds), *Jacques Tourneur* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Film Festival, 1975), pp. 16–35.
- 16 Andrew Britton, 'The politics of difference, or: how to create a socialist-feminist culture in one capitalist country without really trying', *CineAction!*, no. 17 (1989), pp. 3–15.
- 17 Janine Marchessault, 'The critic's choice: things great and things not so great', *CineAction!*, no. 15 (1988), pp. 8–12.
- 18 Andrew Britton, Ian Cameron, V. F. Perkins, Douglas Pye and Michael Walker, 'Lola Montes discussion', *Movie*, no. 29/30 (1982), pp. 108–21.
- 19 Andrew Britton, *Katharine Hepburn: Star as Feminist* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2003). First published 1984; without the subtitle, which was added after Britton's death.

and *Blonde Venus* (1932), can and clearly should be referred to the existence of 'an ideology of American individualism and enterprise,' but they do not reflect it, and the narratives centred on them do not demonstrate its efficacy by virtue of their adherence to the formal rules of linear causality. (p. 436)

He proceeds to incisively argue that 'the opposition between personal and impersonal narrative causality is wholly unreal' (p. 438):

At any given historical moment, a culture offers its inhabitants a certain set of terms with which to make sense of the impersonal determinants of individual feelings and actions, and we must understand narration as an activity of reality testing whereby the nature, content, and adequacy of these terms are examined and reexamined through the histories of representative symbolic figures . . . in the great Hollywood movies . . . character-centred causality is inseparable from the dramatization (often highly critical) of the impersonal social forces which structure individuality in twentieth-century bourgeois culture. (pp. 439–40)

Britton summarizes and critiques existing theoretical positions with absolute clarity and precision, and his prose has extraordinary vigour and momentum. An overall sternness gives way in places to humour by turns impish and lordly, which relies for its (great) effectiveness upon an expert modulation of his unfailingly formal register and elegant constructions. His critical arguments are informed by a continually startling range of reference, and produce powerful and persuasive interpretations of the cultural significance of the texts he discusses.

The anthology's subtitle, which promises completeness, is slightly misleading. In addition to the omissions helpfully pointed out by Brad Stevens in his review in *Sight and Sound*,¹¹ I would note that only one of the two excellent articles on *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949) collectively written by Britton and the other members of the *Framework* editorial board is included in the anthology.¹² Also missing (and available in the same edition of *Framework*) is the longer version of Britton's article on *Pursued* (Raoul Walsh, 1947).¹³ The anthology instead includes the version of the essay that appeared in *The Movie Book of the Western*,¹⁴ which contains less of Britton's engagement with Paul Willemen's discussion of *Pursued*¹⁵ (and which leads to the article being dated 1996 when its content is in fact twenty years older). Other contributions to debates by Britton that are not included in the anthology are his 'The politics of difference, or: how to create a socialist-feminist culture in one capitalist country without really trying',¹⁶ a rejoinder to Janine Marchessault's response¹⁷ to his 'Myth of postmodernism' essay, and the *Movie* round-table on *Lola Montes*.¹⁸ The programme notes that Britton wrote to accompany a Katharine Hepburn season at the National Film Theatre in 1984, also not included, are available in his book on Hepburn.¹⁹

It would be wrong, however, to end on such an ungrateful note. *Britton on Film* remains an indispensable volume, and if it sounds outmoded to declare that it represents a great contribution to our collective film culture, then that gives further evidence for the continued urgency of Britton's intervention.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp042

Stephanie Marriott, *Live Television: Time, Space and the Broadcast Event*. London: Sage, 2007, 137 pp.

FRANCES BONNER

In the many recent discussions of the future of television, its end, or the possibilities of the post-televisual world, little attention is paid to that originally staple characteristic of the medium – its liveness. Liveness and flow are the two founding concepts of television studies, but far more time has been spent debating, and dismissing, flow than analyzing liveness. Stephanie Marriott's book addresses the absence, but also helps to explain it. Once you have noted that the percentage of total television output which is now live is less than it was for the first decade or so of its existence, what else is there to say? Sustaining a whole book, even a slim one such as this, can be hard going, and few if any have previously attempted it. In such a situation, a phenomenological approach requiring exhaustive detailing of the taken-for-granted provides one solution, and melds well with the close attention to individual utterances of a communication specialist like Marriott.

So the book is to be welcomed, even by those who find the outcome of phenomenological studies underwhelming, because live television is really such an odd type of thing that it deserves thorough investigation, whether or not most scholars prefer to consider pre-recorded drama programmes and our students tell us they only watch boxed sets and downloads (usually overlooking much of their own practice). Marriott does not deny the reduction in truly live television, but also notes how, as a feature of the schedule, it "stubbornly refuses to go away" (p. 59). In addition to the large events that are her main concern, she lists the news, time-of-day shows, shopping channels and the 24-hour surveillance of reality shows – though the last usually have brief inbuilt delays. Strangely she omits from this list that prime supplier of televisual liveness, sport. Fortunately the tense shifts in the commentaries that accompany live sport's obsessive replays of moments of play just past are irresistible to a communication scholar and so there is a chapter analyzing commentary on snooker, tennis, boxing, bowls, football and many other sports. When the complexities of the shifting back and forward in time are actually laid out for inspection, it can seem astonishing that commentators can produce them or viewers

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comprehend, but in the ordinary course of the show it all seems quite natural.

Apart from the chapter on sport, whose regularity brings the 'event' status of the subtitle into question, her main examples are of the American morning television that becomes the catastrophe coverage of 9/11, the 1997 BBC Election Night coverage, the 2005 Jean Charles de Menezes shooting by British police and a 2003 Channel 4 programme *Derren Brown Plays Russian Roulette*, which was later revealed, despite the hyping of its liveness, to have been recorded with a time delay in case the illusionist Brown failed in his stunt and distressed viewers with a messy death. In between these are discussions of *Springwatch*, *Big Brother Live*, *Noel's House Party* and occasional other British programmes. The oddity of the inclusion of the American instance is unremarked and, since most countries took the US feed, understandable, but the failure to ask questions about national distinctiveness is characteristic of the phenomenological approach which requires the bracketing off of so much else in its attention to the moment.

While Marriott's tools present a painstakingly detailed picture of certain aspects of live television, in particular those concerned with the articulation of time and space, there is much left unexplored. The role of liveness in the survival of the medium is certainly one of them. The 'stuff' of the world in Marriott's understanding is primarily that stuff which is mediated, not the medium itself, nor the web of economic, social or political forces within which it operates. Other electronic media are relevant mainly because they can enable viewers to join in live, talking back to those speaking through television, not because they are threats to television's viability through siphoning off advertisers. Nor do we gain any hint of how live television might differ from live coverage 'born' online.

The strength of the book is in its very close attention to the moment-by-moment operation of time in live television. Marriott differentiates valuably between immediacy, when event and reception are simultaneous, and instantaneity when transmission and reception coincide. Immediacy is thus the special quality of the live broadcast (or narrowcast in the case of subscription channels) and it encourages a very particular form of engagement. As Marriott notes: "To be in the presence of the live event is thus to be swept away into a moment which is transpiring simultaneously with the now of one's engagement with it: it is to be in the event even as the event endures" (p.72). Such simultaneity always holds the element of risk, the knowledge that something may go wrong, even in the most carefully planned of events. Marriott begins her book with *2000 Today*, the BBC Millenium night coverage noting how much went wrong, though not the failure of the promised river of fire down the Thames discussed by Karen Lury in her examination of that same coverage in the 'Time' section of *Interpreting Television*¹. The importance of the sense of possibility, that anything could happen, which keeps us watching live coverage despite a general lack of eventfulness, is

¹ Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Education, 2007).

amply demonstrated by re-watching that same coverage later – few pieces of television are as boring. Remember Diana’s funeral cortege endlessly trundling through London streets?

Liveness is just one aspect of the larger category of televisual time Lury considers as one of the four formal aspects by which television can be understood, along with image, sound and space. Patricia Mellencamp had earlier argued that time was preeminent. Writing in 1992, she noted the divisions and relentlessness of the schedule, how programmes were constructed to meet its requirements, and then how catastrophe coverage could cut across this inexorable forward movement by interrupting the schedule and bringing us news about an event live. The qualities of liveness were not her concern, it seemed incidental to her Freudian and gendered consideration of the medium.² Lury too considered the schedule, but writing in 2005 she is unable to ignore the time-shifting technologies that, with the exception of live coverage, can free viewers from the schedule’s dictatorial tendencies. Like Marriott, she too gives due attention to space. Marriott does this through comparing the 1997 election night coverage with 1955 and 1992, explaining how all instances allowed discussion of and from ‘simultaneous elsewheres’, but how technological developments and confidence in their operation had resulted in the establishment of a hierarchy of centre and peripheries that had not been evident earlier. This is certainly an instance when her fine attention to detail produces an unexpected result.

In all the admittedly limited writing on liveness, the role of the presenter seems strangely under-considered. Hardly any live television is without live commentary and far more often than not that voice issues from a body on-screen. Most of the analyses of live programmes include detailed transcriptions of what was said, frequently revealing the slips, repetitions and hesitations of everyday speech. For some programmes, an amount of pre-scripting is possible, but for almost all the instances Marriott looks at, presenters are working from monitors and a one-way earpiece connection to the control room. It requires considerable skill, and what is broadcast is inflected through the usually well-known persona of the presenter. With the recent celebration of the Moon Landings anniversary, following closely on the death of CBS anchor Walter Cronkite, the story of his choking-up over the first lunar step has been reiterated many times. This addition to probably the most significant ever live broadcast was particularly meaningful to the US audience because they knew the man and his foibles so well. The same popular knowledge inflects the reception of David Dimbleby and many of the other reporters for the 1997 election, but although unlike all the other speakers whose words are analyzed, Marriott does name these ones, there is no consideration of what these speakers, rather than others, had brought to the viewer’s experience of the live broadcast. Presenters are a key element of live television, onscreen or in voiceover they direct our attention, explain what we are seeing or are about to see, and fill the silence that would otherwise unsettle our viewing. Their fluffs and

2 Patricia Mellencamp, *High Anxiety: Catastrophe, Scandal, Age, and Comedy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

infelicities, the banalities of many of their utterances, help us through media events, or in the case of those accompanying us through the mundanities of domestic mornings, provide reassurance that life goes on. Marriott's book adds usefully to our understanding of the mechanics of live television, but it tells us little about the live bodies who pilot us through it.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp033

J.P. Telotte (ed.), *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* (Essential Readers in Contemporary Media and Culture series). Lexington, KT: University Press of Kentucky, 2008, 356 pp.

JAMES CHAPMAN

While there is a significant critical literature on science fiction in cinema, on the small screen it has been less well served by academia. Accounts of television science fiction – with a few notable exceptions¹ – have tended to be the preserve of fans and enthusiasts, whose work is characterized by passion if not necessarily by scholarly rigour.

Given the scarcity of work in this field, any new study is to be welcomed; but the most impressive feature of *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* is not merely that it plugs a gap but that it does so in an informed, enlightening and, for the most part, highly engaging manner. Editor J.P. Telotte has a good track record with two previous monographs on science fiction cinema,² and his contributors represent a broad range of multidisciplinary specialisms, including literature, cultural studies, feminist theory, and film and media studies. Thirteen of the sixteen contributors hold posts at North American universities and this is reflected in the contents of the volume, focused largely on US television. This is understandable enough – US series such as *Star Trek* (1966–69), *The X Files* (1993–2002), *Battlestar Galactica* (2004–09) and *Lost* (2004–) have become part of an international television landscape through export and global syndication – though it would have been useful to include more non-US examples for comparison. The exceptions are chapters on Japanese anime television by Dennis Redmond, and the history of British science fiction television by Mark Bould, which both offer broad-brush surveys. This is a minor criticism, however, and at least British science fiction television has been served by its own anthology.³

A particular strength of this volume is the judicious way in which Telotte and his contributors balance theoretical perspectives with a solid grounding in historical context. The tone is set by Telotte's introductory chapter, mapping 'The trajectory of science fiction television', which provides a contextualized history of the genre's emergence and development, highlighting key themes and landmark series, whilst also addressing some of the intellectual issues arising from the study of

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² J.P. Telotte, *Replications: a Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1995), and *The Science Fiction Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

³ John Cook and Peter Wright (eds), *British Science Fiction Television: a Hitchhiker's Guide* (London: IB Tauris, 2005).

infelicities, the banalities of many of their utterances, help us through media events, or in the case of those accompanying us through the mundanities of domestic mornings, provide reassurance that life goes on. Marriott's book adds usefully to our understanding of the mechanics of live television, but it tells us little about the live bodies who pilot us through it.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp033

J.P. Telotte (ed.), *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* (Essential Readers in Contemporary Media and Culture series). Lexington, KT: University Press of Kentucky, 2008, 356 pp.

JAMES CHAPMAN

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science fiction. He highlights a tension within science fiction studies between its status as a cultural artefact – science fiction ‘has simply become a text of choice for a postmodern world’ (p. 4) – and its relationship to the wider culture. Thus, on the one hand, science fiction is about the ideological construction of a future society that ‘often seem[s] less a continuation of our own historical circumstances than, to evoke one of the more popular series, a quantum leap to another history’ (p. 4). On the other hand, however, science fiction has often been understood as a vehicle for exploring the political and cultural anxieties of the time, from the Cold War in the 1950s to the post-millennial anxieties of the present. To this extent television science fiction has often been more immediate than science fiction cinema, providing ‘evidence of its growing importance as a tool of cultural deliberation and ideological exploration’ (p. 5).

The book is organized thematically, with four sections – on cultural contexts, types of narrative, major themes and case studies of key series – topped and tailed with an introduction and, rather than a conclusion, a speculative essay on the future of television science fiction by Charles Tryon. In the first section Lisa Yaszek provides an excellent case study of how literary science fiction has been translated onto the small screen, focusing on a 1954 production of Judith Merrill’s novel *Atomic Attack* for the anthology series *The Motorola Television Hour*. Yaszek demonstrates how television demanded a more narrative-driven form and altered the characterizations of the novel accordingly. It became the model for science fiction adaptations in other anthology series from *The Twilight Zone* (1959–64) to the Sci-Fi Channel’s lesser-known *Welcome to Paradox* (1998). And Gerald Duchovnay offers a survey of film-into-television crossovers, including *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* (1964–68), *Planet of the Apes* (1974) and *War of the Worlds* (1988–90). Duchovnay argues that the key to small-screen success lies with the agency of the producer: thus *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, which ran for 110 episodes, was successful due to the control exerted by Irwin Allen over the production, whereas *Planet of the Apes* had a chaotic production history and ended up being cancelled after only fourteen episodes. The case of *War of the Worlds* provides further evidence of this view. Its first season, conceived by producer Greg Strangis as a sequel to the 1953 George Pal film, had a largely positive reception, but ratings declined when a new producer, Frank Mancuso, Jr, drastically altered the format for the second season and the series was cancelled.

A recurring theme is the extent to which television science fiction has been rooted in global geopolitics. This informs some of the best chapters. Wheeler Winston Dixon, for example, finds that early juvenile series such as *Captain Video and His Video Rangers* (1949–55), *Space Patrol* (1950–55) and *Rocky Jones, Space Ranger* (1954) were vehicles for Cold War propaganda, presenting their young viewers with a bipolar view of the universe in which a free US-led interplanetary version of the United Nations fought a highly ideological, totalitarian and usually

Asiatic enemy. Dixon further shows that *Flash Gordon* (1954–55), produced on the cheap in West Berlin, explicitly drew upon Cold War imagery, even if was often for budgetary reasons: in one episode newsreel footage of a workers' demonstration in East Berlin was used to represent an uprising on Neptune! Rodney Hill's essay on *The Twilight Zone* shows how this anthology drama was used by creator Rod Serling to offer commentary on issues generally considered taboo for television at the time, including McCarthyism, racism and the threat of nuclear war. While we are used to looking for McCarthyite readings in science fiction films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (Don Siegel, 1956), Hill shows that this was also a feature of television: an episode such as 'The Obsolete Man' – in which a librarian who has been deemed obsolete in a totalitarian society where books are banned turns the tables on his inquisitor during a televised tribunal – can be read as 'a thinly veiled reference to the televised Army-McCarthy hearings of 1954, which helped strip Senator Joseph McCarthy of his political clout' (pp. 123–4). And M. Keith Booker's essay on 'The Politics of *Star Trek*' argues that for all its apparent multiculturalism and its progressive position on race relations, the series is nothing if not a vehicle for the projection of US military power. It includes allegories of the Cold War ('Balance of Terror', 'Day of the Dove') and of US involvement in Vietnam ('A Private Little War'). It perpetuates Orientalist stereotypes in the dark-skinned Klingons and Asiatic Romulans (suggesting that its multiculturalism does not extend to the non-American Other) and represents other worlds as either feudal societies or technocratic dictatorships. The ideology of *Star Trek* 'is one based on a thoroughly western vision of the importance of material wealth and technological modernization' (p. 198).

Other contributors focus on issues of representation and cultural politics. Susan A. George considers the remade *Battlestar Galactica* as a vehicle for expressing technophobia through its association with female sexuality. This is represented in the form of the sexy Caprica Six (Tricia Helfer), whose body is both a weapon and a symbol of power. While the association of 'bad' femininity can be traced back to the femmes fatales of 1940s film noir, George argues that this postmodern/posthuman manifestation offers 'a more complicated and challenging image of the strong and sexual woman' (p. 167) as *Battlestar Galactica* does not end with the restoration of patriarchal order. Sherryl Vint offers a reading of *Babylon 5* (1994–98) that emphasizes its relationship to mythic archetypes and its narrative structure as a classical epic. Unlike predecessors such as *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5* 'never reduces things to a binary of good and evil, instead offering a complex analysis of how the category of "right" can be constructed to serve any end' (p. 251). This has the effect of detaching the series from the more familiar (and arguably reductive) reading as an allegory of Middle Eastern geopolitics in the 1980s and 1990s. Rather, it represents an attempt to create a universal mythology suitable for a postmodern age in which society has lost touch

with its history and myths. Vint concludes that ‘the major theme of *Babylon 5* is the need for community, the ideal that we are one despite surface differences of race, religion, nation, and class’ (p. 261). *The X Files*, in Lacy Hodges’s chapter, emerges as another text conditioned by postmodern ideas. It was a genre hybrid, part science fiction, part horror, part police series, ‘which challenges both the aesthetics and logic of mainstream television while offering an intriguing alternative’ (p. 243). I would not dispute Hodges’s analysis of the series, where she astutely draws out its different modes of representation and argues that it occupies ‘a liminal space between the mainstream and the margins’ (p. 231), but I am not convinced that the series was quite as groundbreaking in this respect as she implies, as similar examples of hybridity, self-referentiality and intertextuality can be found in non-science fiction series such as *Moonlighting* (1986-89) and *The Avengers* (1961-69).

Ultimately, any collection of essays will stand or fall on two criteria: the quality of the individual contributions and the degree of cohesion between them. By these criteria I would judge *The Essential Science Fiction Television Reader* a success. There are a couple of below-par essays, but otherwise the contributions demonstrate analytical rigour and critical insight. Inevitably there are some lacunae, and it would be good to see more studies of, for example, science fiction adaptations such as the BBC’s faithful rendering of *The Invisible Man* from the 1980s (though Dixon has some perceptive observations on the ITC version of the late 1950s, which owed little to H.G. Wells) or its much-vaunted dramatization of John Christopher’s *The Tripods*. And I, for one, felt the absence of Gerry Anderson’s ‘Supermarionation’ series of the 1960s such as *Stingray*, *Thunderbirds* and *Captain Scarlet and the Mysterons*, which, as Nicholas Cull has argued, can be read as a site of Cold War propaganda.⁴ These points notwithstanding, this is a balanced and cohesive collection that should prove a very good reader for undergraduate and postgraduate courses on science fiction television.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp035

Cynthia Baron and Sharon Marie Carnicke, *Reframing Film Performance*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008, 301 pp.

STEVE NEALE

Along with Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, Alan Lovell and Peter Krämer, Paul McDonald, Roberta Pearson, Doug Tomlinson, Frank Tomasulo and a number of others, Cynthia Baron and Sharon Carnicke have been at the forefront of a renewed interest in film acting for nearly a decade. In *Reframing Film Performance*, Baron and Carnicke have pooled their research and expertise. In doing so, they have produced a stimulating, richly illustrated and powerfully argued book that will serve film studies

4 Nicholas Cull, ‘Was Captain Black really red?: the TV science fiction of Gerry Anderson in its Cold War context’, *Media History*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2006), pp. 193–207.

with its history and myths. Vint concludes that ‘the major theme of *Babylon 5* is the need for community, the ideal that we are one despite surface differences of race, religion, nation, and class’ (p. 261). *The X Files*, in Lacy Hodges’s chapter, emerges as another text conditioned by postmodern ideas. It was a genre hybrid, part science fiction, part horror, part police series, ‘which challenges both the aesthetics and logic of mainstream television while offering an intriguing alternative’ (p. 243). I would not dispute Hodges’s analysis of the series, where she astutely draws out its different modes of representation and argues that it occupies ‘a liminal space between the mainstream and the margins’ (p. 231), but I am not convinced that the series was quite as groundbreaking in this respect as she implies, as similar examples of hybridity, self-referentiality and intertextuality can be found in non-science fiction series such as *Moonlighting* (1986-89) and *The Avengers* (1961-69).

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teachers, researchers and students for some time to come and that is likely to stimulate further work on a topic that is still often neglected.

Reframing Film Performance is divided into three different sections. The first, 'Cinema's Varied Use of Gestures and Expressions', establishes the basis of the book's approach. Here Baron and Carnicke underline the importance of acting in film, seek to account for its neglect, and offer a series of observations on the range, place and functions of film performances. They argue that: 'Screen performances are an integral component of film, contributing to audiences' interpretations just as framing, editing, lighting, production, and sound design do', but that 'scholars writing about the cinema have often separated acting from all other aspects of film, treating actor's work as resistant to descriptive analysis and lacking an objective, critical vocabulary' (p. 1). They go on to argue that film acting has been neglected for two main reasons, both of them linked to the nature and status of film as a medium. One is that 'stage performance has often been associated with legitimacy, complexity, and authenticity, while screen performance has often been viewed as something other than true acting' because 'actors are protected by the net of cinema technology' (p. 11). The other is that theorists of film, from Pudovkin to Metz, have often seen this same technology as the foundation for film as an art form or 'language' and have often downplayed the contributions made by actors and acting. The phenomenon of stardom and the extent to which organs of publicity have consistently downplayed the labour of actors has tended only to reinforce the notion that film actors do not really act: they merely play themselves. In this regard the apparent exception of the attention paid to the Method is, as Baron and Carnicke point out, no real exception at all.

The Method is perhaps a particularly paradoxical case of the tendency to conflate characters, actors and star images in public discourse and in studies of film alike. Star images, characters and actors do, however, have something in common: 'none of them are part of filmic discourse or representation per se. Only gestures and expressions, which are executed by actors and become associated with characters and stars, are part and parcel of films' (p. 62). Here they exist alongside, indeed usually inside, lighting patterns, editing patterns, blocking patterns; camera positions and movements; patterns of silence, noise and music; sets and other spatial locations; narratives and other temporal structures; and all other aspects of film design. The functions, nature and place of gestures and expressions, of 'postures, intonations and inflections' (p. 62) can vary enormously. In a many avant-garde films, human figures and human movements can often be little more than 'pieces in a collage' (p. 38). In a number of modernist art films, the range of gestures and expressions can often be curtailed, limiting spectatorial access to the thoughts and feelings of characters and promoting other aspects of film design. In most mainstream narrative films, gestures and expressions are designed to make the thoughts and feelings of characters more accessible and to contribute in key ways to the development of the narrative and to

modulations in mood, tone and pace. In the work of ‘neonaturalist’ independents such as John Sayles and John Cassavetes, filmed performances can be ‘treated as a primary cinematic element’ (p. 39). The same is often true, albeit in different generic registers, of musical performances and comic routines. Performances like these are often star turns. But drawing on Stephen Heath’s typology of characters, performers, figures, persons and ‘ideas’ in *Touch of Evil* (Orson Welles, 1958), Baron and Carnicke are careful to point out that the range of functions performed by actors (including bit-part players and extras) and the range of functions performed by non-professionals who appear in incidental ways is often extensive.

In the second section, on ‘Performance, Elements, Cinematic Conventions, and Cultural Traditions’, Baron and Carnicke discuss a range of different examples. They focus first of all on Jan Mukarovsky’s essay on Chaplin’s performance in *City Lights* (1931). Distinguishing between the ‘vocal components’, facial expressions, gestures and poses, and ‘those movements of the body by which the actor’s relation to the [cinematic] stage space is expressed and carried’ (pp. 98–9) and noting that Chaplin’s performances often eschew extensive movements, pausing instead ‘to present tableaux in which facial expression and small gesture dominate’ (p. 99), Mukarovsky goes to argue that Chaplin’s performance is built around what he calls an

interference of social gesture-signs with individually expressive gestures. Everything in Chaplin’s acting is aimed at heightening and sharpening this interference, even his special appearance: formal attire which is ragged, gloves without fingers but a cane and black derby . . . The integrating emotional feature of the social gestures is the feeling of self-assurance and superiority, whereas the expressive gestures of Chaplin-the-beggar revolve around the emotional complex of inferiority. These two planes of gestures interweave through the entire performance in constant catachresis.¹

The irresolvable nature of this structure of interference is marked by the film’s own unresolved ending and articulated in and through a series of shots that conclude with an exchange of looks and a closeup of Chaplin’s face. To that extent, staging and framing, editing and shot composition, even the uses of sound, music and silence, are as crucial to *City Lights* as they are to the audiovisual articulation of any other performance in any other film.

In order to underline this point, Carnicke and Baron go on to compare and contrast a series of adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* (George Cukor, 1936; Franco Zeffirelli, 1968; Baz Luhrman, 1996) and *Hamlet* (Laurence Olivier, 1948; Tony Richardson, 1969; Franco Zeffirelli, 1990). They then look in detail at the ways in which the acting styles in *Seven Samurai* (Akira Kurosawa, 1954) and *The Magnificent Seven* (John Sturges, 1960) reflect different ‘cultural aesthetic traditions’. The respective influences of Noh and of a mix of western methods result in performances in the

1 Jan Mukarovsky, *Structure, Sign and Function: Selected Essays* by Jan Mukarovsky, trans. and ed. John Burbank and Peter Steiner. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978.

former 'distinguished by strong, horizontal movement grounded in the actors' pelvic areas', while those in the latter 'play against the vertical axis and feature isolated gestures of the arms. Similarly, while choreography of performance in *Seven Samurai* creates the impression that characters are defined by their communal identity, blocking patterns in *The Magnificent Seven* convey the point that its characters belong to a society that places a premium on individual identity' (pp. 139–40).

In the final section of *Reframing Film Performance*, Baron and Carnicke use the vocabulary devised by Francois Delsarte to analyze the gestures and expressions used by Harold Perrineau, Jr and Forest Whitaker in a scene in *Smoke* (Wayne Wang, 1995) and the vocabulary devised by Rudolph Laban to identify the 'inner actions' that govern the actors' movements and that serve to convey the dispositions, goals and tactics of the characters they play in scenes in *Training Day* (Antoine Fuqua, 2001) and *The Grifters* (Stephen Frears, 1990). In all three cases, these vocabularies serve as means by which to identify the roles played by acting, as well as by blocking, editing and framing, in the moment-by-moment articulation of the scenes themselves. In doing so, they serve to underline a major point made in the book's conclusion, which is that these and other vocabularies can help 'make acting choices visible' (p. 236). More than that:

Analyzing acting as a component of film can also transform one's view of cinema. Exploring acting allows the reciprocal relations between framing, editing, and performance elements to come into view and shows that films create meaning through combinations of formal details. . . . Thus giving performance elements their due can illuminate the simple yet surprising idea that films are enriched by the expressivity of all their cinematic components (p. 237).

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp037

Christine Geraghty, *Now A Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007, 232 pp.

Jack Boozer (ed.), *Authorship in Film Adaptation*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008, 384 pp.

DEBORAH CARTMELL

Over the last few years an unprecedented number of groundbreaking works have taken the field of adaptation beyond the edges of 'Lit Crit' and onto another level. As Linda Hutcheon¹ has so thoroughly argued, adaptations make explicit what is sometimes only implicit in all books, films, plays, paintings, and so on: that all art is based upon other art. This 'explicitness' is what Christine Geraghty defines as 'a recognition of ghostly presences and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface

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by what is glimpsed behind' (p. 195) in her excellent book, *Now a Major Motion Picture: Film Adaptations of Literature and Drama*.

The author sets herself the brave task of putting the 'source' book last in her approaches to various types of adaptations in order to prioritize what is often forgotten in discussions of these films, such as the function of costumes, acting, decor, space and setting. For instance, in her analysis of adaptations of *Pride and Prejudice*, instead of revealing the ways in which the films "'hold a conversation" with the original', Geraghty persuasively demonstrates how the adaptations can be seen as 'explorations and celebrations of femininity that actually depend on the transformation of Austen's novel into a conventional romance' (p. 43). Indeed Geraghty's approach helpfully liberates the adaptation, often referred to derogatorily, from reductive and unfavourable comparisons to the 'original' novel or play, but nonetheless, the virtually forbidden literary source creeps in most prominently in her readings of popular rather than classic adaptations. In her chapter on feminism, authorship and genre, she claims that with adaptations of authors such as Edna Ferber and Pearl S. Buck, 'the importance of authorship in the discourse that surrounds these films' means that 'the discussion will refer more directly to the original novels and their authors' (p. 105). It could effortlessly be argued that the reverse is also true: discussions of adaptations of novels by canonical writers such as Austen and Dickens are engulfed by a seemingly unavoidable discourse around authorship, while readings of film reconstructions of the work of Ferber and Buck often make no reference to 'source' texts. There is a sense here that Geraghty wants to agree with Larry McMurtry, one of the scriptwriters of *Brokeback Mountain* (Ang Lee, 2005), that 'strong books make weak films' (p. 152), or at least that 'strong books make weak film criticism', and that it is helpful to talk about authors of popular adaptations but a hindrance in discussions of adaptations of 'classic' literature.

The book is divided into five sections: 'Narrative and characterization in classic adaptations: *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist* and *Pride and Prejudice*'; 'Art cinema, authorship and the impossible novel: adaptations of Proust, Woolf and Joyce'; 'Feminism, authorship and genre: adaptations of the novels of Edna Ferber and Pearl S. Buck'; 'Revising the Western: movement and description in *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Brokeback Mountain*'; and 'Space, setting and mobility in old New York: *The Heiress*, *The House of Mirth* and *Gangs of New York*'. The structure reveals a contemporary and welcome desire to move Adaptation Studies beyond author or text-centred approaches but also covertly uncovers the consequent lawlessness or randomness that this type of analysis produces. Indeed, thanks to the work of authors such as Linda Hutcheon and Thomas Leitch,² the area has become so immense that containment seems an impossible feat. The strengths of the book are in the details, the case studies (often maligned by theorists of adaptation), in which the author writes beautifully about the ways in which different layers, such as genre, space, stardom and setting, create meaning in the

2 Thomas Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: from Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

film adaptations under discussion. Serious students and academics will learn a great deal from Geraghty's film-centred approach to Adaptation Studies that, for too long, has been stifled by the deadening not-as-good-as-the-book mindset.

Geraghty treats all contexts, such as genre, space and stardom, equally, while Jack Boozer's collection seems to privilege concepts of authorship in adaptations. I was surprised to learn on the first page of *Authorship in Film Adaptation* that the book I had just opened was not about the presentation or representation of 'literary authors', but about screenwriters and the adaptive process as it concerns film 'authors'. Divided into four parts – 'Hollywood's "Activist" Producers and Major Auteurs', 'Screenplay Adapted and Directed By', 'Writer and Director Collaborations: Addressing Genre, History, and Remakes' and 'Variations in Screenwriter and Director Collaborations' – the book's mission is to raise the profile of adapted screenplays (though I think this could have been clearer in the book's title). Rather than the source text, Boozer, in his introduction, provocatively identifies the significance of the screenplay as 'the direct foundation and fulcrum for any adapted film' (p. 4), the platform upon which the film attracts producers, directors and actors, and surveys its multiple roles and neglected history. While this statement might arouse concern that such an approach could hurl the field back to a reliance on 'authority' or fidelity, Boozer's aim is to demonstrate that an understanding of collaborative authorship is vital to the area of Adaptation Studies. However, as I progressed through the book, the question persisted: *is* this really a book about screenwriting? Without the title, and the introductions that, perhaps protest too much about the coherence of each section, the book's alleged theme would not be at all apparent. There are some exceptions, such as R. Barton Palmer's fascinating reading of how John Fowles's postmodern 'doubleness' in *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), in which the author simultaneously provides both narration and commentary, is translated in Harold Pinter's screenplay and Karel Reisz's 1981 film. The screenplay is very much the focus of Thomas Leitch's account of Hitchcock's relations with his screenwriters and the ironic impossibility of identifying an 'author' in any of the films of a director for whom the classification of 'auteur' is rarely interrogated. Screenwriting is also embedded in Shelley Cobb's analysis of the film adaptation (Sharon Maguire, 2001) of Helen Fielding's novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* (2001), in which she shows how screenwriters, Richard Curtis and Andrew Davies, attended and contributed to the novel's cultural and generic intertextualities.

Like Geraghty's book, delight can be found in the parts rather than in the whole and, rather than leading us in a single direction, Boozer's collection, perhaps in spite of itself, succeeds in showing us the variety of directions that the study of adaptation can take us. The time might be ripe to stop kidding ourselves that there can be a single theory of adaptation, or that the field has a distinctive shape, or a Holy Grail yet to be uncovered. What I would welcome now is less general work on film

adaptation and more genuinely focused and adventurous studies in areas such as popular adaptations, screenwriting 'auteurs', the script, specific ideological approaches to adaptations, teen adaptations, adaptations of graphic novels, adaptations of history, novelizations, video game adaptations, television-to-film adaptations, film-to-theatre adaptations, or adaptations before sound. Each of these deserves a book-length study of its own rather than being fleetingly glanced at in studies that try to do too much. As both these volumes reveal, the terrain seems limitless, and to try to fence it in it is to do it a disservice.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp034

Steven Ricci, *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA and London: University of California Press, 2008, 233 pp.

Noa Steimatsky, *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema*. Minneapolis, MN and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008, 246 pp.

DEREK DUNCAN

Fascism poses problems for historians of Italian cinema. While the work produced during that period is no longer entirely disavowed or discredited, it nevertheless provides an uncomfortable antecedent to the heroic moment of postwar neorealism and cinema's much-vaunted role in national reconstruction. Part of the problem is that fascism, like the advocates of neorealism, believed in the potential of the medium to create a common culture in its audiences. Debates around the political and aesthetic particularities of neorealist cinema uneasily negotiate any residual attachments to fascism, most evident in continuities of personnel in the industry. While it is now clear that feature films made with the support of the fascist regime were not overtly propagandistic in content, and were more thematically varied and technically accomplished than once had been allowed, they offer an unwanted inheritance to a body of work that sought to break from Italy's immediate past.

Steven Ricci's *Cinema and Fascism: Italian Film and Society, 1922–1943* and Noa Steimatsky's *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* ostensibly sit on either side of the divide created by the fall of Mussolini and the new republic. Ricci's attempt at clear periodization, however, contrasts with Steimatsky's reluctance to section off the past from the present. The contrasting sense of temporality is indicative of other differences between the two books. While in a broad sense both are part of recent attempts to reinterpret the cultural history of Italy during and after fascism, their methodological approaches are distinct. While Ricci is much more concerned with cinema's relationship with the state, and with its audiences, Steimatsky interrogates film as an

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element of a broad cultural field, drawing on an expertise in early painting, photography and architecture in order to offer a rich contextualization and detailed textual analysis of the works she studies.

Ricci's main focus is on 'the relationship between the rise of fascism and the experience of cinema in Italy' (p. 3). He is interested in the wide range of social and economic factors that would have shaped film production and audience responses in Italy during the twenty years of the fascist regime. Ricci begins by looking at how film historians have viewed films made under fascism. He offers a useful overview of the conditions in which films were made in this period, then in the following chapter examines more closely the relationship between the state and film production. A particularly interesting theme of the book is Italian cinema's ongoing relationship with Hollywood and how the industry tried to respond to the alluring models that it produced. The third chapter explores in more detail a range of films comparing ideologically driven historical epics with popular comedies set in the 1930s. The key point here is the tension between fascism's avowed modernity and its cultivation of the past. The regime's commitment to modernity was shown in its relationship to the USA. Ricci's discussion of the documentary *Mussolini Speaks* (1932), made for an American public, reveals Italy talking back to its cinematographically dominant partner. A key point to emerge from Ricci's engagingly written and wide-ranging volume is the importance of documentary production under fascism as a means by which the state could both represent and address the nation. The very charged realism of these films provided, amongst other things, the backdrop to the counter-representational strategies of neorealist filmmakers who began to imagine Italy differently. While Ricci's book has much to offer, it is a pity that the author was unable to engage with the most recent work in Italian, most notably Vito Zagarrío's *Cinema e fascismo*.¹

1 Vito Zagarrío, *Cinema e fascismo: film, modelli, immaginari* (Venice: Marsilio, 2004). For an invaluable overview of recent work in Italian see Alan O'Leary, 'After Brunetta: Italian cinema studies in Italy, 2000 to 2007', *Italian Studies*, vol. 63, no. 2 (2008), pp. 279–307.

As its title suggests, Steimatsky's *Italian Locations: Reinhabiting the Past in Postwar Cinema* is interested in revisiting both the geographies and histories of Italian cinema. Focusing on a carefully selected corpus of work by key directors of the postwar period, the book is also testimony to the enduring interest in neorealism as a crucial experience in the aesthetics and politics of film production. To return to neorealism should be a daunting task in that so much has already been written on the subject. Yet Steimatsky's work is far from being a familiar rerun of an arguably over-analyzed set of films, and critical topoi. Firstly, the chronological span of her book exceeds conventional periodization. Beginning with a discussion of Antonioni's early documentary production in the late 1930s, she concludes with an extended exploration of Pasolini's work around *Il vangelo secondo Matteo/The Gospel According to Matthew* (1964) in the mid 1960s. In the intervening chapters, she looks at work by Rossellini and Visconti. Yet her decision here to focus on Rossellini's *Germania anno zero/Germany Year Zero* (1948) and Visconti's *La terra trema* (1948), ostensibly two films

indelibly associated with neorealism, is motivated by a desire to situate them in a different critical space. The book is divided into four substantial chapters, each devoted to the work of a particular director. Yet Steimatsky's challenge is to read the work of each through an organizing trope that illuminates the part while connecting it to a broader set of cinematic and cultural concerns. The determination to rethink the terms of engagement with neorealism is evident throughout the book.

In her introduction, Steimatsky sets out the contentious histories and geographies that she goes on to elaborate. Insisting on the 'newness' of neorealism, she also holds on to its strenuous attachment to the past. Situating its energies as part of Italy's postwar 'predicament of reconstruction' (p. xi), she negotiates its commitment to the future by attentive examination of the dialogue between 'the realist ethos as a natural ally in a national project of reconstruction' and its 'modernist critical elements' (p. xxii). The problem of modernism was its association with fascism, yet a conventional realist aesthetic might have proved too conciliatory. As a solution to this apparent impasse, Steimatsky argues for an 'oppositional realism' that would retain a politically motivated commitment to representation, while offering openings to an as yet unrepresentable future. The potential displacement inherent in this conjunction anticipates the work of Bazin and Deleuze in the international context who prise the neorealist aesthetic away from its dependence on the contingent circumstance of postwar Italy.

Under the rubric 'aerial', Steimatsky prefaces her discussion of Antonioni's short documentary *Gente del Po* (1942/1947) with an examination of his earlier writing on the 'spirit' of landscape. Yet she complicates his idealist vision by situating it in terms of fascism's general enthusiasm for aerial themes in art and cinema.² The possibilities offered by documentary for avoiding cinematic narrative conventions are not eradicated by these associations, but are certainly complicated by them. In the subsequent chapter, Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero* and his significantly later *Viaggio in Italia/Journey to Italy* (1954) are the terrain on which Steimatsky pursues an investigation of the 'ruinous' as a defining trope of postwar Italy. Conceptualizing the ruin as both evidence and commemoration of the past, she argues that Rossellini articulates an aesthetic of the contingent or everyday that disrupts the past's monumentalization. In exploring Rossellini's work in conjunction with contemporary debates in architecture and town planning, and his cinematic displacements of the ruined landscape to Berlin and Pompei, Steimatsky reveals an uncanny temporality at the core of his contemporary representations.

La terra trema, inspired by nineteenth-century literary realism, is approached through a consideration of the photography of Sicilian novelist Giovanni Verga. Tracking a 'subterranean genealogy of cinematographic modernity' (p. 116), Steimatsky argues that Visconti goes beyond the representational function of the still photographic image to find an expressive function in the landscape itself. The length of time

2 A fascinating parallel to Steimatsky's work is Angela Dalle Vacche's chapter on aviation and Italian cinema's early female stars: Angela Dalle Vacche, *Diva: Defiance and Passion in Early Italian Cinema* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp. 105–28

he took to shoot the film reveals an almost obsessive desire to capture the mythical promise of the Sicilian countryside promoting it from mere backdrop to choral participant. Visconti's glimpse of atemporality in what appears resolutely present leads on to the book's final chapter on Pasolini, read through the trope of the 'archaic'. Having spent a considerable amount of time on location in Palestine, Pasolini chose to film *The Gospel According to Matthew* in southern Italy showing his characteristic ambivalence towards modernity through consciously elected anachronism and displacement. His use of frontal mise-en-scene depends on an eclectic borrowing from early Italian painting intimating the vital remnants of a still-to-be superseded past embedded in the present.

Too little work in English has been done on the texts and contexts of Italian cinema. The dominant and persisting tendency to rest on an auteurist model of criticism, however innovatively articulated, necessarily limits the field. Both these books are to be welcomed for their contributions to expanding the field and methodologies of Italian film studies.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp036

Catherine Wheatley, *Michael Haneke's Cinema: the Ethic of the Image*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2009, 216 pp.

JOHN ORR

To my knowledge, Catherine Wheatley's book is the first full-length study of Michael Haneke written in English. While good anglophone criticism does exist, it is in essay form. The pieces that spring to mind are the landmark essay by Brigitte Peucker on Haneke's 'modernist melodramas' and the astute articles by Maximilian Le Cain and Matthias Frey for the online journal *Senses of Cinema*.¹ Wheatley's book goes much further by being doubly ambitious, providing a detailed and brilliant reading of Haneke's film career to include the remake of *Funny Games* (2007) but also reconsidering Haneke through the concept of spectatorship and the meaning of the act of watching, or what she calls 'the ethic of the image'. Whereas semiotic theories have previously tried to show how the spectator is positioned, ideologically speaking, within the cinematic apparatus, Wheatley's quest is to show how Haneke tries to position his audiences outside of it, perceptually naked and alone, forced to judge for themselves, a positioning which implies, following the director's own controversial metaphor, 'raping his spectators into awareness'. A contradiction in terms? Certainly. But Wheatley's exploration of that contradiction while reading the films themselves, thereby trying to kill two birds with one stone, works triumphantly. This is a bold, lucid and fiercely intelligent book, a vital addition to the study of contemporary cinema by one of the UK's brightest young film critics.

1 Brigitte Peucker, 'Violence and affect: Haneke's modernist melodramas', in *The Material Image: Art and the Real in Film* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 129–58; Maximilian Le Cain, 'Do the right thing: the films of Michael Haneke', *Senses of Cinema* <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/03/26/haneke.html>>; Matthias Frey, 'Michael Haneke', *senses of cinema* <<http://archive.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/haneke.html>> [both accessed 16 September 2009]

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Wheatley's insistence on a neo-Kantian reading of ethical spectatorship, strongly influenced by Stanley Cavell, where spectators as rational beings must respond to the spectacle of pleasure the screen offers by referring it back to the morality that governs everyday experience, is refreshing. 'Mainstream cinema', a term whose usage she shares with Haneke, tries to exploit the offering of pleasure, including violence, as a distraction willingly accepted by audiences – 'a refuge', as Wheatley calls it, 'from the world of responsibility'. How far Haneke returns us to that latter world in the way he claims is another matter; and how far early or 'first-generation modernism', as Wheatley calls it, failed to do this to the same degree is equally contentious. I would argue, for example, that Bergman, Kubrick, Resnais, Antonioni, Hitchcock in his modernist period, and early Godard all offer a cinema that is open and reflexive and encourages ethical spectatorship. Haneke is in that tradition but has in no way surpassed it. His best films provide us with new and exciting variations on it; his lesser films can seem stale. He belongs, I believe, to a second generation of open, reflexive modernists, one where the names of Wenders, Egoyan and Kieslowski spring immediately to mind. And he has come to cinema relatively late in his life, after theatre and television.

While the formalism of Haneke may be neo-Kantian in its strategy, his gut aesthetics lie in Brecht, Adorno and Benjamin, a gifted triumvirate at odds with one another in the 1930s yet blended by Haneke into a formula for his Austrian pictures. Brecht inspired in Haneke a preference for tableau mise-en-scene and cinematic alienation effects he initially called 'glaciation', only for the term to be thrown back into his face by enthusiastic critics. Benjamin stressed the false totality of the bourgeois artwork as a misguided response to the death of aura and an element in the growth of fascism; as Wheatley points out, in confronting false totality Haneke has systematically used modernist moments of disruption to preempt it. But the key player in the trio is surely Adorno, whose dissection of modernist writing into an early phase of ironic reflexivity (Proust, Joyce, Gide) and a later phase of shock aesthetics (Kafka, Beckett), as twin elements of a legacy of defiance resisting the capitalist world and its commodity culture, is a key to Haneke's own work and his view of Hollywood. In his counter-cinema, reflexivity and shock are blended by the Austrian director into a late modernist aesthetic that tries to do two things: first to take on contemporary Hollywood on its own terms, including its pseudo-ironic makeover of violence as audience-pleasure; and second to incorporate into the reflexive mix the multiple electronic media that have come to dominate our everyday lives by the turn of century. This Adorno update, I would argue, is the key to what Wheatley has called 'the aggressive reflexivity' of Haneke's films in second-phase modernism.

And yet, a hidden contradiction clouds the picture. In the early Austrian trilogy Haneke's characters, unpsychologized, become mere symptoms of a commodified world, robotic ciphers whose sudden malfunctions shock and disturb us when they erupt within Haneke's tight

fragmented shooting. These ciphers inhabit an enclosed space where Haneke seems to fuse the claustrophobia of the life-world found in an earlier central European director, Roman Polanski, with the claustrophobia of the media world found in the Canadian-Armenian Atom Egoyan. The world of the trilogy is a closed world, one of fatality and not freedom, where the events that shock seem somehow preordained. Haneke's sense of fatality may indeed stretch back to earlier Austrian director Fritz Lang, and be mediated by Haneke's favourite Hitchcock film *Psycho*, where top-of-the-range decoupage impels us to think nothing could have happened otherwise in the spectacle of disaster. But if nothing could have happened otherwise, the problem for ethical spectatorship is what judgment other than this could possibly be made. There may be a hundred whys and wherefores to 'explain' the violence that occurs, but they can easily be crushed by the fatality-image and the mood it generates. As pastiche Hitchcock, the fatality of the Austrian films are too dependent on volatile audience response. Haneke's weakness is that his audience can easily shift from feeling helpless to the sense that the whole exercise is pointless. Haneke might argue that the spectator who feels helpless should feel guilty about such feelings and think about why that is so – a fine line in sadomasochism. But those who reject such wilful submission can simply toss the ball back into Haneke's court: instead of agonizing, they can angrily demand why they have had to sit through something pointless. Or just walk out.

I would argue that the value of Haneke's cinema increases with greater openness in mise-en-scene, which in turn enhances the greater openness in narrative: in other words, outside of Austria. Filming *Funny Games* in the Italian Lakes was a start; as was the stunning performance of Arno Frisch as Paul, the lead psychopath. If you want sympathy for the devil in great doses, this is the picture for you. If, however, you want a thriller in which you are uncertain at the start whether or not the besieged family will escape their kidnappers, it is not. In the contempt with which Haneke treats the family's smugness you can sense they are already doomed. Wheatley's counter-argument that Haneke uses modernist moments of disruption – the video-rewind sequence for one – to deny pleasure and deconstruct generic suspense after promising it in great abundance is fair enough. But if you know from the start you are watching the fools going down, your attention switches to the cunning of the knaves. Frisch here is Haneke's first genuine star attraction, combining Hitlerian contempt for bourgeois victims with a good line in postmodern irony, giving us in effect a post-Gestapo cool that is more disturbing for what it says about Haneke than what it says about his picture. Paul's contempt for his victims and his 'funny games' seem to mirror a barely-suppressed contempt by Haneke for his manipulated audience, a killer blow, as Wheatley notes, to his much vaunted 'freedom of viewing'. And as a knowing, media-savvy psychopath, 'Paul' also bears an uncanny likeness to Viennese journalist Jack Unterweger, a media celebrity playing 'funny

games' with admirers and found guilty of a series of prostitute killings at the start of the 1990s.

But in making these extravagant comparisons I am already opening up the film in the way that Wheatley says an ethical spectator would. *Funny Games* has its own power of enigma even though its provocations never made it the commercial hit Haneke wanted. His response was to secure the attractions of lucrative female stars and the geography of Paris: Juliette Binoche and Marin Karmitz's MK2 productions thereby suggesting a shift from manipulating the audience to seducing them and following in Kieślowski's footsteps ten years on. The attractions of the French female stars – Binoche and Isabelle Huppert – helped Haneke open up the image even further, but it was typically French stardom based on what we might call (following Kristeva) a cinema of abjection that was already in place when Haneke arrived. It certainly paved the way for his most successful and powerful film *Caché* (2005). Wheatley's reading of this film through the juxtaposition of shame and guilt is near faultless, demonstrating how adept she is at leaving the best until last in this intriguing book.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp039

Kay Dickinson, *Off Key: When Film and Music Won't Work Together*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 247 pp.

JASON TOYNBEE

This is an admirably ambitious book, in which Kay Dickinson studies cycles of films in which music and moving image (or narrative) are poorly integrated. She then examines these failures for symptoms of contradiction in the labour process, not only of the cultural industries in which they were produced, but also of the larger capitalist economy beyond. The book is historical, too, in that each of the chapters deals with a successive film cycle and period: rock'n'roll movies in the 1950s; Ken Russell's composer biopics in the 1970s; so-called video nasties in the 1980s; a couple of Mick Jagger and Madonna vehicles in the 1990s and 2000s.

One important reason for liking this book is its contribution to the renewal of explicitly political screen studies, a trend which is still, at the moment, quite weak. Dickinson suggests that film–music 'mismatches' are evidence, indeed an important form of evidence, of the changing pathology of capitalist labour relations. These relations yield new forms of domination, as well as ideological obfuscation of that domination. The book's originality then lies in the way that Dickinson shows how the mismatch between film and music might be considered symptomatic of such historical shifts, broadly from industrial to postindustrial capitalism. From this perspective I think the analysis of mismatches is often very good. For instance, Dickinson shows how synthesizer soundtracks to

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early 1980s horror films (or 'video nasties') clash, through their cool and untroubled iteration, with the violence which erupts episodically onscreen. There is careful argument here about the way that the synthesizers used in the films are symptomatic of supposedly functional labour substitution and de-skilling in the era of Thatcher and Reagan. Similarly, Dickinson suggests that the narrative structure of rock'n'roll movies like *The Girl Can't Help It* (Frank Tashlin, 1956) becomes dysfunctional when the music of black and/or young musicians in the distinctively alien culture of rock'n'roll is shoehorned in. Such performances are enactments of the 'wrong kind' of labour. Dickinson's further point is that such a contradiction mirrors a larger one which emerges in the US economy of the 1950s. Black people flood the labour market and gain economic power, even while they continue to be culturally and politically excluded through segregation.

Historical specifics in these cases are handled well, then, and the parallels between cinematic mismatch and moments of social-historical contradiction are often nicely drawn. I am less sure about the overarching theoretical approach used by Dickinson, which is broadly dialectical. I say broadly because a range of sources is referred to, including Marx, Hegel, Adorno and Deleuze. The problem here is that these are by no means compatible one with another. So, famously (but not remarked upon in this book), Marx turned Hegel on his head, substituting a materialist for an idealist dialectics, and Adorno's dialectic is a negative critique of the Hegelian conception. Meanwhile Deleuze attacks the whole Hegelian tradition, repudiating dialectics altogether in favour of indeterminacy, nomadism and indifference.

I would say that precision about, and choices among, these conflicting accounts of the dialectic matter not because it is important to get metaphysics right for its own sake, but because in a book like *Off Key*, explanation from the social to the textual is everything. How contradiction arises in the labour process and how you then get from that contradiction to a music/narrative mismatch in film are the central questions raised. Yet it is often unclear what kinds of mechanism (or making-happen) are at stake here. In the introductory chapter, the emphasis, after Marx, is on the covering up, or ideological distortion, of relations of production: 'What is usually happening in a mismatch is an unsuccessful effacement of labour' (p. 39). This is cogent as far as it goes, but what is really needed to flesh out such an account is some notion of *levels* of causality.

Political economy surely needs to be considered, and specifically the sectoral and intersectoral dynamics of the music and film industries. Thus in the 1950s the independent record companies which pioneered rock'n'roll were much more flexible and opportunistic than the megalithic studios of Hollywood. This factor contributed to diverging aesthetic regimes, from inertia to innovation. Whereas narrative conventions were deeply inscribed in centralized and oligopolistic film production and distribution, in the case of rock'n'roll, regionally dispersed studios and radio stations, in combination with the

development of a national youth market, encouraged hyper-innovation among musicians. At the notionally higher level of the 'political unconscious', a different set of what are more properly cultural-psychological mechanisms come into play. Here what is at stake are varying degrees of effacement or misrecognition of real social and economic structures on the part of cultural producers. It seems to be the conjunction of contradictions at both levels (that is, political economy and ideology) that generates the mismatches which Dickinson identifies.

In fact she does discuss both levels, and indeed develops a multilayered account of contradiction in music, film and society. But what is missing is a sense of the *emergence* and *conjunction* of causes, beginning with the central contradiction between forces and relations of production under capitalism, a contradiction which is then refracted across different levels of social reality – sectoral and intersectoral economics, textual and performance conventions, technology, the (repressed) beliefs of producers about the nature of the social world they inhabit, and more.

Crucially, the complex and emergent nature of social reality (in short, its historicity) means that a sufficient conjunction of contradiction-expressing factors is not present all the time. And that in turn explains why *Off Key*'s mismatches are intermittent, why they appear and suddenly disappear. In effect, this intermittence is itself further evidence of the profoundly contradictory nature of capitalism. Even when you cannot detect a mismatch, contradiction persists. It is just that the pathology is better hidden.

As may well be clear by now, I make these criticisms from a critical realist and Marxist standpoint. But in so doing I hope I am also being true to the spirit and intent of the author herself. In the introductory chapter she says, '*Off Key* will abide by a historical materialism, one that is sensitive to the machinations of history, struggle and production specificities' (p. 37). I would say this is an important and worthwhile pledge. But if it is to be properly carried through, there is a need to show as coherently as possible the connections between different parts of the system from capital to text, and between the contradictory dynamics of domination and liberation which emerge as a consequence. No easy task. It is a tribute, then, to Dickinson's interpretive powers and analytical skill that *Off Key* gets so far, despite its reliance on a set of mismatched theories.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp041

Constanza Burucúa, *Confronting the 'Dirty War' in Argentine Cinema, 1983–1993: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009, 231 pp.

MIRIAM ROSS

Over the last three decades the political cinema of Latin America has been extensively documented in English-language criticism, raising the

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Constanza Burucúa, *Confronting the 'Dirty War' in Argentine Cinema, 1983–1993: Memory and Gender in Historical Representations*. Woodbridge: Tamesis, 2009, 231 pp.

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Over the last three decades the political cinema of Latin America has been extensively documented in English-language criticism, raising the

question of why we need to return to this theme in a text on Argentina's 'Dirty War' cinema. We might also question the return to a particularly national context when transnationalism and border-crossing have become the more popular trends in recent scholarship. What is immediately apparent is that this book-length study on just one decade in Argentina's cinematic history allows for an attention to detail that is often overlooked in other approaches to Latin American cinema.

At times this means that new snippets of information emerge, such as the revelation that famed political filmmaker Fernando Solanas began his career composing jingles and directing commercials (p. 46) or that the Argentine press followed *La historia oficial* (Luis Puenzo, 1985) from its preproduction stages through to its exhibition (p. 123). The scope of the text also makes it possible for the introduction to offer an in-depth account of the specific Argentine sociohistorical—political processes that defined both the Dirty War and the move to democracy. Highlighting these factors is a useful move considering that the numerous military crises, and their effect on the cinema of twentieth-century Latin America, are often easily conflated.

By outlining her decision to apply this narrow focus, Burucúa asserts an association with critics such as Thomas Elsaesser and Dudley Andrew who have been attempting to counter the less rigorous film histories, which they regard as surveys and overviews (p. 21). The alignment with these scholars pertains to a deliberate methodological approach which centres on the use of historiography and textual analysis. While initially there seems to be undue attention paid to methodological issues, particularly debates of historiography that do not specifically connect with Argentine cinema, this does allow Burucúa to frame the critical paradigm that she believes is important to her analysis, and the mode of textual analysis which is often taken for granted is used only after careful scrutiny.

This combination of historical approach and textual analysis uncovers an interesting point (and place) at which a body of films looked both backwards and forwards in a national context. On the one hand the films analyzed deal with memory and trauma in relation to the Dirty War period, while on the other they look to the future because 'film became a privileged arena in which to give image and voice to a new national project' (p. 1). Describing how films of the period work in this way allows Burucúa to make a careful distinction between those post-Dirty War films and the earlier 'Third Cinema' films that were more explicitly future-looking because of their concern with creating a revolution (p. 51). It is for this reason that a revision of Third Cinema (again, a subject which has been extensively written about) in her second chapter seems an apt addition to the text. The remaining chapters outline how various film types from political and paramilitary thrillers to women's cinema and more experimental films have undertaken the task of dealing with a difficult and often painful history. At the heart of this study is a focus on the way that the 'looking back' nature of the films has articulated identity and, in particular, gender as a cultural construct.

At the same time, haunting the text is the issue of national identity and how this can be formed within a 'national cinema'. Although Andrew Higson's and Stephen Crofts's works on 'national cinemas' are cited, Burucúa appears to avoid the complexity they add to the 'national cinema' debate by returning to the idea that a singular national context exists and is supported by a country's films. Thus she makes the powerful claim that this book will demonstrate 'how the reconstruction of a national identity through cinematic discourse appears to be central to the Argentine cinema of the period in question' (p. 26). Even when Burucúa acknowledges that rather than replicating a predetermined identity on screen, the films can be better understood as an attempt to write an identity and its histories, there is the suggestion that this process can be understood by uncovering a body of films that fully contain this method. Although the author acknowledges that she has been selective in picking a restricted number of films from the period to represent this canon of work, there does not appear to be space for other Argentine films that work outside this nation-building project. A major contradiction therefore arises when the work of María Luisa Bemberg, one of the most famous Argentine directors of that period, is not included. This omission is explained by the fact that none of her films have 'explicitly focused on the period covered in this study, namely the years of the last military dictatorship' (p. 111). Nonetheless, it raises the question of how many other important Argentine films of the post-Dirty War era do not fit in with the 'reconstruction' process mentioned above, and of what this says about Burucúa's understanding of the 'Argentine cinema of the period'. These issues are further aggravated by the fact that the processes of coproduction in the chosen texts are merely skimmed. Although many of the films analyzed were the product of transnational collaboration, the authors suggests that an examination of coproductions is not productive for her research (p. 29). This seems a shame, as the coproduction aspects of the films raise very interesting questions about the nature of 'nation-building' works which are produced as collaborations with other national contexts.

In part, these flaws seem to arise from the fact that the text is overflowing with a huge range of critical sources which, as well as Latin American scholars, range from Christian Metz to Judith Butler, Thomas Elsaesser and Pierre Sorrin. Although the use of these sources displays wide-ranging research, it often feels as if the attempt to deal with all of their critical ideas means that the really important work being done – the uncovering of interesting cinematic interventions during the post-Dirty War period – is not thoroughly dealt with. There is the sense that this is also the case for some of the more complex debates such as the relationship between national identity, memory, trauma and filmmaking. It is obvious that the period and the cinema under scrutiny offer great potential for some weighty research, and this book opens up some interesting issues. Yet a more complex and focused approach may be needed before the greater importance of this period truly comes to light.

doi:10.1093/screen/hjp040

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Notes to Contributors

There has recently been a major development in the submission and processing of manuscripts at *Screen*. On 1 March 2009, after much discussion and in collaboration with our publisher OUP, we switched to the **ScholarOne Manuscripts** online submission system. Many readers will already be familiar with this method, but for those who are not, it will in essence mean that manuscripts are submitted through the ScholarOne Manuscripts site, and thereafter all communications between editorial office, author and peer reviewers will be channelled through, and logged by, the system. Our intention, in moving to this new system, is to improve efficiency and clarity in all aspects of the process: providing, and encouraging from others, a swifter response; creating an easily accessible history of a manuscript's progress; reducing the need for photocopying and printing.

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Notes and references, which should be kept to a minimum, should be on an automatic numbering system. Style for citations of written sources is as follows:

1. Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: the Imaginary Signifier*, trans. Celia Britton et al. (London: Macmillan, 1982).
2. Ginette Vincendeau, 'Melodramatic realism: on some French women's films in the 1930s', *Screen*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1989), pp. 51–65.
3. Monika Treut, 'Female misbehaviour', in Laura Pietropaolo and Ada Testaferri (eds), *Feminisms in the Cinema* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 106–21.

References to *films* in both notes and main text should include full title, and in the case of non-English language films original release title should precede US and/or British release title, followed by director and release date in round brackets: *A bout de souffle/Breathless* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1960)

Where such information is relevant to the argument, details of production company and/or country of origin may also be included: *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, Warner Bros, US, 1945)

References to *television programmes* should be dated from the year of first transmission, and, in the case of long-running serials, the duration of the run should be indicated. Details of production company, transmitting channel, country, etc should be supplied where relevant: *Coronation Street* (Granada, 1961–)

Where writers or producers are credited their role should be indicated:

Where the Difference Begins (w. David Mercer, BBC, 1961)

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ISSN 0036-9543 (PRINT)
ISSN 1460-2474 (ONLINE)



OXFORD JOURNALS
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